

In But Not Of the World

A Notebook of Theology and Practice

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By

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A NOTEBOOK OF THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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IN BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

Initially this little book was asked for by the Inter-seminary Committee of the National Council of Churches, to provide a study book about the ministry for a national conference of the Interseminary Movement. The Committee saw the author as one who had just come from the pastorate of a rather prophetic church in downtown New York, to a position where wider perspective—geographical and possibly theological—might be expected. The arresting problems and claims tackled here, as it turns out, are certainly not just for seminarians or ministers, but for laymen who know something about the urgency of the situation.

To Alice

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Foreword</i> | ix |
| I. <i>Koinonia</i> and Church Fellowship | 1 |
| II. The Body of Christ and the Church's Living Heritage | 22 |
| III. The Authority of the Word and the Church Program | 42 |
| IV. No Salvation Outside the Church and Evangelism | 64 |
| V. The Kingdom of God and How the Church Lives in It | 89 |

Foreword

In the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John we read these words in the great prayer for the Church:

"I do not pray that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. . . . As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into thy world."

Here we have posed the great dilemma of the Christian church. Here the words of Jesus lay out the map of the country in which the called-out people of God must dwell in time—in the world, but not of it; thoroughly immersed in the human struggle and yet holding the passport of a homeland whose boundaries lie beyond our senses and even our imaginings.

Now it is one thing to note this tension, and quite another to live the life of the Church in such tension. And yet live it we must. Our hungry souls have driven us in the last two decades to cry out for a clearer doctrine of the Church. We have been slowly perceiving that such a doctrine is an indispensable part of a whole theology. The necessity for new study in this area was born first

in the discussions that produced the ecumenical movement and its visible expression, the World Council of Churches. It has been reinforced by the general resurgence of theological inquiry and by confessional endeavors to rethink the bases for their own traditions.

Yet the practice of the Church sometimes seems to have little recognizable acquaintanceship with the emerging doctrine of the Church. It is all very well to be facile about the divine nature of the Church or about its apostolic mission, but when you seek answers to the questions, "In what way is my membership in the First Protestant Church a unique experience?" or, "How does my church confront the community with the saving gospel?"—then the real test of a doctrine of the Church is made.

We have many excellent works on the nature of the Church. Newbigin's *The Household of God*¹ and Nelson's *The Realm of Redemption*² are two of the best. Yet it is still true that American Protestants have no clear feeling-apprehension of the Church as their primary community of loyalty. The mores and values of the churches are so mixed up with the goals and folkways of American culture that the situation is more desperate than we often admit to ourselves.

In fact, a good case could be made for the observation

¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954).

² J. Robert Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption* (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1951).

that in many ways American Protestant churches are *of* the world, but not *in* it. That is, that whatever Christology is claimed by creed or covenant, the real "Lord of the Church" is the dominant drive of the culture at the time. This does not mean that our churches are deliberately apostate or are even very conscious of how molded their life is by the powerful currents of a mass communications age. The minister frequently makes superficial references to the enemies of the Church in phrases like "materialism," "secularism," or "success philosophy." Yet these allusions seem to be so general that little serious judgment is brought to bear upon our common life by them. Moreover, we frequently make the assumption that these alien world views are true only of institutions and people other than the Church; or we rush hastily through the statement that of course the Church has its share of sinfulness, and seem to conclude that there is little we can do about it.

The rising walls of a majestic new theology of the Church must not be allowed to become theological talk only. It is ironic that a resurgence of historic terminology about the uniqueness of the Christian church can obscure how much *of* the world we really are. We can get the illusion of being separated from the world, but actually all we may be doing is setting up a neat compartment within the pluralistic American scene, where we can talk our own brand of gobbledegook, lay out our own genteel variation on respectable be-

havior, and tell our own family jokes. In social dynamics, we are so similar to other semiprivate compartments, the business community, the fraternal costume ball, the academic life, that we may move from one to the other, and into the church and out, with little adjustment of outlook or concern.

The intention of this book is to examine the life and practice of American Protestant churches in the light of the emerging theological consensus about the nature of the Church. This study is certainly not an exhaustive analysis of our church life, nor does it give very many conclusive answers about what we should do. It is simply an attempt to do what must be done in a more detailed and continuing way, namely, looking at doctrine and practice together. This does not mean that a specific set of "how to" plans can ever be deduced from theological insights. Nor does it mean that doctrine is not true unless it is immediately and pragmatically vindicated. It does mean that faith and order and life and work must at points be considered together—or two different institutions, neither one of them wholly the Church, will develop.

J. Robert Nelson's work, *The Realm of Redemption*, has been indispensable in laying out the main areas of doctrine and the central problems in these areas, which are of paramount interest in contemporary theology. This scholarly summary has been the guide for the sections on doctrine. He is, of course, to be completely

absolved from responsibility for the implications the author has drawn from his study.

Three historic definitions of the Church that have been returned to liveliness in theological discussion recently are the centers of the first three chapters—*koinonia*, the body of Christ, and “where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments rightly administered.” The last two chapters are built around two of the crucial theological questions involved in the doctrine of the Church. They are, “Is there salvation outside the Church?”, and “How is the Church related to the kingdom of God?”

In each chapter, a particular aspect or problem of contemporary American parish life is yoked with the doctrinal statement.

Undoubtedly these linkages are somewhat arbitrary. It is left to the reader to provide the necessary qualifications and cross references.

CHAPTER I

Koinonia and Church Fellowship

EPISODE

David Lyons pulled into the driveway of his split-level home at a speed just exceeding that of his normal entrance. He stopped close to the house to let out his wife, who was laden down with empty dishes. He could tell by the resigned way she moved toward the door that she knew how annoyed he was, although he hadn't said a word. She was probably phrasing in her mind how she would open the inevitable discussion. "No, Dave, you can't judge the whole church by what happens at a family night supper," she would say. Or, "Really, Dave, it wouldn't hurt you to unbend a little bit. Mr. Jenkins' jokes may be a trifle ministerial, but he is actually very nice." And what could he say to that? She was absolutely right. All the people at the church did seem friendly and eager to be neighborly, but—well, he just didn't have time to get involved in another group.

He drove on into the garage, helped Susan, age two, out of the car, and went with her into the kitchen. He picked up his briefcase where he had hurriedly tossed it on his way from the office to the church. He had a lot of work to do tonight, and Mary Lyons understood the silent reproof he intended to convey by the way he swung the briefcase. He sat down at the dining-room table and began his work. Nothing more was said until after Susan was put to bed and Mary came and sat down at the table.

"I know you didn't want to go to the family night supper at the church, Dave, but really, if we're going to belong to the church, we have to go to things."

"Why?" he asked, more sharply than he intended. "I mean, Susan goes to Sunday School, and we go to church fairly regularly. We contribute our share. I believe the church is important to a community, and I even get something out of laughing boy's sermons occasionally." He noticed her pained expression at the gibe and said, "I'm sorry, Jenkins is okay, I guess, but he symbolizes what I really can't take as far as this church is concerned. Everyone is trying so hard to be such an eager beaver. If I've heard it once, I've heard it a hundred times. We're a *friendly* church. We're a *friendly* church. Personally, I'm suspicious when you have to keep talking about it. Anyway, I already belong to more groups than I can handle. You know how the boss is. He wants all the junior executives in the

office to be a close social group as well as a working team. And now that I've taken on this job as secretary of the Civic Association, we just have to spend time entertaining the people I'm going to be working with. And there are both families. You know how your mother is about Sunday evenings. Besides, I don't see why the church has to try to pre-empt the social life of its people. It seems to me its main job is to give its members individual inspiration. The thing I like about Sunday morning service is that I can be quiet and sort of at peace."

Mary was silent for a minute. She stared hard at the pewter teapot on the buffet, and tried to assemble her thoughts for a rejoinder. She was confused too about the church's stress on fellowship, and didn't know where to begin. She tried to remember what Mr. Jenkins had said when he spoke to the women's society last month.

"Dear, I'm not sure whether I've got it exactly right or not, but fellowship is important in a church for more than just social reasons. Sometimes it even seems to me that Mr. Jenkins thinks fellowship is the main reason for the church's existence. He's spoken many times about the church of the first century when everyone felt so close together that they even held all their possessions in common. It's got something to do with a Greek word. *Koinonia*, that's it." She was proud to have remembered it.

"What on earth are you talking about, Mary Lyons? And what is this fellowship stuff anyway? Isn't it just liking people and enjoying being with them? Personally, that bunch at the church is the last group I'd choose to have a good time with."

"Dave, please don't be impatient. I told you I'm not really sure why, but I do know fellowship is important. Every important person in that church keeps saying so, and we've got to act as though we think so too, if we're going to belong."

DOCTRINE

Koinonia is a word frequently employed by the apostles to describe the essential character of the Church. The English translation, "fellowship," is quite inadequate to carry the full meaning of the word. The New Testament employs it in several ways that give varying shades of meaning to the pattern of experience the early church meant by *koinonia*. The different translations given in the Revised Standard Version are an illustration of how the context necessitated several usages.

There are those passages that seem to use the word to describe the close spiritual relationship between the believers and God, either through the person of Christ or the Holy Spirit.

In Paul's benediction in II Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,

and the (*koinonia*) fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all," the familiar translation is used. In Philip-pians 2, "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation (*koinonia*) in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind," a more active word is chosen. And this usage of the word to refer to close communication between redeemed men and God is specifically related to the Lord's Supper in I Corin-thians 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ?" Thus on one level, the *koinonia* is seen as a mystical relationship between men and God.

In I John 1:3, however, the term is widened to de-scribe this spiritual uniting with God and also with one another: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship (*koinonia*) with us, and our fellowship (*koinonia*) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

And then there are those places where the writer uses the word to indicate the common life of the com-munity of believers only. In Acts 2:42, at the end of the account of Pentecost, it is written of the new church, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Sometimes this is used even more specifically to relate to mutual interdependence and responsibility for the weaker members of the group. In Romans 15:26, it is recorded, "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints (*koinonia*) at Jerusalem."

And in II Corinthians 8:4, it is similarly used, "begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints."

Koinonia in the New Testament seems to be a comprehensive description of the unique life of the community of believers. It is a community that is closely and personally interdependent, but deriving its life from the amazing power of God that is the Holy Spirit. It fundamentally seems to mean "participation in something in which others also participate."¹

The Church defined as *koinonia* seems close to being a psychological description. This does not mean that it was unreal, or something completely the subjective experience of the people who were gathered together. In fact, it means almost the opposite. *Koinonia* was a recognizable togetherness that people felt in their whole being, their mind and body. This togetherness was there only because they felt the reality of God impinging upon their minds and physical beings. The

¹ J. Y. Campbell, "Koinonia and Its Cognates in the New Testament," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, p. 353, as used in Nelson, *The Realm of Redemption*, p. 53.

translation "participation" is well used, because it avoids the chicken-and-egg argument about which precedes which, human association or awareness of the divine. It is true that the sense of commonality was based upon finding themselves companions on the same road upon which they had been set by Christ. But also there is little sense of surprise in the New Testament that Christ should have revealed God to others in the same way. An integral part of the wonder of *koinonia* with God, was that he should have come to dwell in the midst of all humanity, of which they were just a small part. It was the furthest possible distance away from "My God and I, we walk the fields together."

Furthermore, after the initial sense of the gift of grace, the continuing presence of God is expected to manifest itself within the community of the faithful. Nelson says that "the Holy Spirit is henceforth a corporate, not an individual possession. The Spirit dwells in the body. Apart from this corporate community, there is no gift of the Holy Spirit." The church as *koinonia* is a sphere of faith, experience, social intercourse, and loyalty that has unquestioning primacy in the lives of those who are a part of it. This primacy does not arise from a sense of duty or responsibility, but rather from the experience of the reality of God's presence in the midst of the congregation.

CULTURE

The church as *koinonia* is perhaps almost incomprehensible to modern Americans if it is thought of just as fellowship in the customary usage of the term. This word immediately calls up all the powerful psychological and sociological beliefs about group life held as dogma by the popular mind of our day. There has probably never been an age when men and women were more self-conscious about the intricacies and subtleties of their "interpersonal relationships." This preoccupation with social dynamics has two manifestations in our culture that must be taken into account.

The first concern is the widely discussed theme of loneliness and feelings of alienation that characterize our times. The fact that such discussion has become more and more cliché ridden does not alter the fact that it bespeaks some truth. The most important thing about this feeling is not that people feel isolated, but that they are confused as to what they are isolated from. This is the real tragedy that hides behind the tremendous increase in psychosis or the growth of a literature and art of human disintegration. Is it estrangement from self, from tradition, from family groups, or from God? Only a few voices of any status outside the professionally religious offer the last thought, and they are either discounted by the major critics (both in psychiatric theory and the arts) or thought to be

poetizing truth. In any case, whatever reality lies in the characterization of our time as an age of loneliness is not likely to be challenged by the notion that the church is a congenial group of nice people who enjoy believing in the Christian faith together. It is surely a form of gnosticism to imply that the Christian faith has reality only because a group of people join together to promote it and advertise themselves as believers in it.

Another aspect of the fragmentation and breakdown of communication in our times is the extravagant multiplicity of cure-alls promoted to banish the condition. This might indeed be considered the heart of the problem: not that there is loneliness in the land, but that there is such a fantastic variety of experiences offered to us to banish the loneliness—from dianetics to the search for Bridey Murphy, from audio-visual aids to group dynamics, from psycho-social to socio-psychical analyses of human behavior, from vitamin pills to deep freezes. So it goes. In such a phantasmagoria of experience, the fellowship of the church as unique human experience is inevitably set up in competition with satisfying social relationships of all kinds. Is the feeling of belonging to the church so deeply satisfying that no other group membership could take its place? To set out to prove that it is, seems on the surface to be the main business of the church. But can we devise any kind of church program or set of activities that will

prove it? There are churches so successful in becoming the centers of social life in a community that everyone who wishes a place in the status structure must belong. Genuine good feeling, pride in belonging, profound gratitude for the ministry of the church in times both of joy and of sorrow, may characterize a church, and yet *koinonia* may be absent. Unless a people be gathered by God, unless they be convinced that they are gathered by him, in a special way, unless there is a sense that the Holy Spirit is continually at work in their midst, then they are not a church.

The second aspect of our age's intense concern for analyzing personal relationships is known to us in that other cliché, the age of conformity. With all the variety of invention and gimmick, there is a surprising sameness that runs through the land. Though we turn up exotic new cults, they follow a well-worn path of the allowable. Though we make little outbursts of reckless political radicalism on the left or right, the center engulfs the deviation remarkably soon.

David Riesman, a brilliant sociologist, has provided us with the most penetrating analyses of this aspect of our life in *The Lonely Crowd* and *Individualism Reconsidered*. He characterizes the people of these times as *other-directed* personalities, in contrast to tradition-directed and inner-directed generations of former days. That is, whereas men and women of a culture like medieval feudalism lived in unconscious obedience to the

how radically more other than
the age of S. & P.

great norms of class and station, and men and women of the last century built their lives on certain all-encompassing principles and beliefs, so we seem to attune our behavior patterns to the tastes and goals of those immediately surrounding us. Riesman's word picture of the men and women of midcentury America as possessing invisible antennae which reach out to pick up the common feelings of the majority is almost classic. As Riesman describes this prevailing mood, and as it surely exists, it is not just a simple wish to be like everyone else, but is characterized by endless attempts to cover up this desire through protestations of freedom and minor revolts, none of which are so far afield that they cannot quickly become the accepted belief of tomorrow.

Into such a scheme of things, the American Protestant church can fit all too easily. What is easier to belong to than the local Protestant church of the old-line denominations? Moreover, the inverted kind of conformity that manifests itself in small daring and conspicuous difference is possible because of the interim of about thirty years at the beginning of this century when the church was passé. It can be a mark of the inside dopester (to use a Riesman phrase) to have taken up the church again. European theologians may be engaged in a process of demythologizing the New Testament, but American Christians are pridefully engaged in swallowing the old myth without much chew-

ing. Thus it can become a fashionable thing to go to church, to read theology, or to become a professional layman.

What is more, in this age of oversensitivity to interpersonal affairs, the very people the church most needs may be alienated from it if fellowship and *koinonia* are thought to be interchangeable. The most discerning people know enough about group dynamics to recognize when they are being manipulated. For such people, spontaneity of experience becomes a test of the validity of the experience. Though this is not always completely reliable, it often seems to be more so than the guarantee of the sponsor whether it be commercial or ecclesiastical. Thus it may very well be that there is more joy in the familiar circle at the corner tavern than in the family night supper. To pretend that it is not so, or even to scold people because it is so, begs the haunting question.

How then, can the church compete for her rightful place as primary group? The answer seems to be obvious, that she should stop trying to do so, if this means simply trying to become a more attractive circle of personal acquaintances; for the church is based on a scandal, an affront to good taste, and a repudiation of sociability. Participation in Christian brotherhood is possible only because of the experience of the affront. God, the living lord of creation, has accosted me in the midst of my loneliness and my yearning after uniform-

ity. He has forced me to see the truth about myself and about the condition of all men. He speaks through a cross of utter loneliness, so that I know him not through theories about his existence, but through the understanding that he alone can share my "being" with me. He alone is ever completely loving, and completely sure. Through faith I am released from anxious slavery to all other demands. The church is made possible only because justification through faith releases men from bondage to all human institutions, no matter how precious they may be. The membership of the church is, foremost, that company of those who have passed from darkness into light, from death into life. What tie is deeper than the common experience of knowing the same Lord as Redeemer? Only in so far as men gathered together recognize that the same God has spoken to them all is there Christian brotherhood. Then they discover with delight that he speaks to them together. If there is no experience of the leadership of God in this brotherhood, then *koinonia* is absent.

Such flat assertions make us uncomfortable. We ask, How do we know if God is leading through his Holy Spirit? No list of characteristics can be drawn up to identify his action absolutely. If we attempt this, then we are usually defining the spirit of the group, not the Holy Spirit. This, however, is true: if a church has at its heart a group of men and women who have testified one to the other that God is real to them, and who

enter into one another's lives through prayer and study before God, then the Holy Spirit makes known his presence.

Such a brotherhood cannot be manufactured from a formula. Whenever an absolute blueprint for the constituting of the true Church is followed, it usually degenerates into a group of self-righteous puritans or a cell of spiritualists. Such a brotherhood stands continuously under the judgment of God. It is never immune from the threat of hypocrisy. In fact, it stands always more dangerously poised on the brink of this deadly sin. It is a precarious fellowship as far as men are concerned, but under God, the only lasting one.

A church that takes itself seriously as *koinonia* knows more about estrangement than it does about fellowship in the worldly sense. In fact, one of the essential marks of the church, the local church, must surely be its alienation from the gods of achievement, of conformity, of the spirit of the times. David Riesman, discussing the inner side of the need to conform, in his essay, "The Ethics of We Happy Few," says that *failure of nerve* would not be so serious in our times if we could comprehend *the nerve of failure*. He writes:

What is feared as failure in American society is, above all, aloneness. And aloneness is terrifying because it means that there is no one, no group, no approved cause to submit to. Even success—the seeming opposite of failure

—often becomes impossible to bear when it is not socially approved or even known. . . . For mere failure, provided it is found in company, can rather easily be borne; many ideologies have the function of making it possible for people to digest the worst miseries and even death. . . . On the other hand, one who is alone lacks this solace which can make even failure comfortable.

. . . The “nerve of failure” is needed to face the fact that the problem remains unsolved, and the possibility that it is insoluble. Thus we may experience defeat in our personal life-goals as well as in our social aims. Franz Kafka expressed these problems in his writing. He had the “nerve of failure”; he faced failure without illusion and without affirmation.²

Koinonia means acceptance of the nerve of failure as far as the tempting offers of cultural meaning outside the Christian faith are concerned.

It is also true that a church, participating in one another's lives through participation in Christ, knows joy as well as estrangement. This joy is not the tinkle of well-bred laughter over a ministerial joke. It is the sense of relief that comes from not having to pretend any more. To know that you are known by God must surely fill you with shame and the need for confession, but it also fills you with relief. The pure joy of escape

² David Riesman, *Selected Essays from Individualism Reconsidered* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), p. 38. Permission granted by The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., copyright owners.

from "antennae adjusting" is Christian joy. The contrast between the earthy humor of Martin Luther as reflected in his sermons of later life and the tormented fear of God in his early life is a good illustration of the meaning of Christian joy. Then the mood changes from one of apprehension that you may not be quite fitting the mold of your level of society to expectancy that God will provide surprising opportunities every day to a church that holds to him in faith.

This sense of estrangement and of joy is the fruit of the life of faith. A church must know itself to be a separated people, a royal priesthood, a household of God.

PRACTICE

How does this come about in the local church? It comes about only when the leadership of the church puts first things first—the unequivocal preaching of the shock of the gospel, and the insistence on regenerate church membership. The meaning of the first necessity will be discussed in a later chapter, but let us examine the implications of a regenerate church membership. The words call up resistances from those who remember how strictly our Christian tests of church membership have been applied. In reaction to a former period of heavyhanded judgmentalism as far as church membership is concerned, much of contemporary

Protestantism has adjusted itself in two ways. Those churches which historically have used creeds as a part of their order, expect verbal assent but emphasize to new members that broad interpretation is possible. Those churches which have been essentially covenantal rather than creedal have reduced the covenant to a statement of aims and platitudes of co-operation and, as a matter of fact, accept people into membership mostly on the basis of their willingness to join, no matter what the motivation.

As unfortunate as this is, the restoration of a regenerate church membership can not be resolved simply by the setting up of proper screening procedure. It is a tempting but essentially wrong idea to try to build a model church where no one feels at home, and indeed is not admitted, if he cannot frame his religious belief in precisely the same formula as everyone else has done or wear the same religious habits. There are way stations along the road to faith. There is great variety in people's capacity to receive the full measure of religious truth. The complex mixture of essential non-Christian values in our culture with those still firmly related to the Christian heritage presses us toward the drawing of lines and the setting of tests which will separate the wheat from the chaff. Most churches certainly invite criticism for the easy and painless way people get their names added to the roll.

And yet the creation of a regenerate church does not lie in the creation of new ways to wall itself off from the world.

Two great traditions within Christendom have become the heritage of all Protestantism—the church as a gathered community and the church as parish. The view of the church as *koinonia* is fundamentally the process of finding itself as a gathered community, but this must never be done to the exclusion of its parish responsibility. What must be discovered in the local church is a way to express its life as a unique special people without fostering the implication that this is a specialness of pious superiority. Some modern adaptation of the relationship between catechumens and the baptized in the early church must emerge. It is necessary to think of every church in terms of concentric circles. The widest ring includes all those who are somehow related to the church, either by marriage, or through some superficial contact with the church. It includes both the people who, if pressed for religious affiliation, would name the church as theirs, and also the people who might not own it. The next ring includes the nominal members, and also those who are seeking. The inner ring is the fully gathered church, those who know Whom they have believed, those in full communion. These circles can never be too rigidly defined. But the heart of the church, the gathered ones,

must be aware of these groups, and must constantly be seeking to draw people closer to the heart of the church. The whole organism is in some larger sense the church, but the heart which is the generator lies in the center. A regenerate church membership is the corporate life of the ones who are in full communion with God and with one another. The enlargement of that group, through the magnification of the witness of the life that is there, is the way to proceed toward a regenerate church.

This is a delicate art, and is the essence of pastoral responsibility. This does not mean that it is solely the responsibility of the minister. It should be increasingly the shared work of those who know *koinonia* in its deeper dimension.

One of the most obvious implications of such a concept is that full membership in the church should not be possible without sufficient experience in the life, worship, and study of the church, so that its full significance is clear. No one ought to enter into church membership (either by confession of faith or transfer of letter) without adequate orientation and study. This does not equate regenerate church membership with adequate information about Christianity, but it is one essential ingredient, particularly in a time of such general illiteracy about the essentials of the gospel.

The requirements for study, like any other standard of full membership in the church, must not be viewed as ways to keep people out of the church. The need is to provide hungry people with the full meat of the gospel, to spread before them the rich sustenance that is the historic Christian faith, so that they may be filled in their whole being.

The entire matter of the disciplines of the Christian life is related to a regenerate church membership. The fruits of the spirit embodied in character and personality can never be dismissed or supplanted. What is earnestly needed is a new appreciation of the decisive areas of personal Christian witness in our times. The boy scout good deed and the "nice" smile are pallid representatives of the faith of the Cross. A compassion that crosses over the lines of class and race and taste, and an integrity which resists the comfortable blandishments of the *status quo* are indeed the most needful attributes of Christian character.

No amount of participation in the organized life of the church, nor fervor for civic good works, can compensate for the absence of these luminous marks of the Christian man; for *koinonia*, after all, is the meeting of the holiness of God with whole men. The church must cease trying to arrange partial encounters with the spiritual ideas of men, or with the social needs of men. Moralism or recreationism are the chief results of

such attempts to minister in competition or in concert with the culture. God claims a man in all the roles he has to play, and bids him be "one" and be as "one" with his brethren in the church.

CHAPTER II

The Body of Christ and the Church's Living Heritage

EPISODE

"And then, George, we could sell the old building to the new corporation that's building all those parking garages downtown."

Henry Zimmerman, chairman of the board of trustees of St. John's Protestant Church was having lunch with George Robertson, another member of the board, at the City Club. George was examining the site map of a new housing development on the south side of town which Henry had brought with him. There was a large red X crayoned in on one of the best corners in the new development.

George didn't say anything, so Henry began talking again, in a more excited tone. "You know very well, George, that our days are numbered at the present location. Why, I'll bet right now, over half of our mem-

bership drives more than a mile to church, and the greatest number of them live out on the south side. The old neighborhood is changed, George, you might as well face it. They're just not our kind of people."

George cleared his throat and asked a question. "Are there any other churches planning to build out in the new development?"

Henry said, "That's just the point, George. We can get in on the ground floor now. I'm sure we could get the comity assignment from the Council of Churches, and beat all the other denominations out there."

George remarked that it certainly was something to think about, and nothing more was said until the two men were having cigars and coffee in the library following lunch.

"Well, George, what about it?" Henry asked. The other man took a long drag on his cigar, exhaled, and said, "I suppose it's the logical thing to do, Henry, but what about the church's responsibility to the neighborhood where we are? It's been there a long time. My grandfather helped build it."

"Mine did too, and that's why I feel so strongly about it. It's a part of our lives, and I think we should move it where it will be near us. Our families have put a lot into it—let's be quite candid about it; and we ought not to stand by and let the thing just peter out, or be turned into some kind of mission."

Just a touch of red came into George's face as he

spoke. Only his closest friends would know that some indignation was stirring within him.

"Henry, that's mighty close to saying that the church belongs to the people who give the most money to it. Pardon me for sounding so dramatic, but that church belongs to Christ, and not to you, nor to me, nor to the minister, nor anyone else who is a part of it."

Henry Zimmerman was embarrassed to have provoked so much vehemence in his friend. He had known him since they were both children, and he realized he had gone too far.

"You're right; of course you're right, if you bring theology into it. But that's just the point; as good stewards of Christ's church we have to be practical about it. We should move it where it can continue to serve the families that belong to it. After all, we are the body of Christ. That's in the New Testament, I know. And then there's that poem the minister before last was always quoting, 'Christ has no hands but our hands to do his work today.'"

George looked sad. "Somehow, Henry, I don't think that's what being the 'body of Christ' means. We belong to something bigger than this congregation, no matter how much involved it is with our own family history. Something gives this church a life that is more than the sum of all the work we put into it. Maybe we should move the church. I'm not sure. But we mustn't do it just because it's more convenient for us

and some of the other old families, no matter how fancy the rationalization." He smiled.

DOCTRINE

The "body of Christ" is the other New Testament term which stands as a basic point of orientation for much contemporary theological thinking about the church. Again the full connotation is lost to our modern minds because of the varying denotations in the Scriptures as the word is applied in different situations. The application of this term in different situations indicates that there was a common understanding and wide corporate usage in the early church.

Essentially the problem revolves around how metaphorical or how literal the term is intended to be construed.

In I Corinthians 12:27, Paul says directly to the church, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it," after having expounded the absolute interresponsibility of all who are in the church. He says the same thing in Romans 12:5, "So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another."

In the first chapter of Colossians, in the 18th verse, a different perspective is added, when in a summary of the unique attributes of Christ, he is identified as "the head of the body, the church." In the 24th verse of the same chapter, Paul adds the conjoining note of Christ's

suffering and the suffering of the faithful, thus: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is the church."

In Paul's account of the Eucharist, this term is related to the meaning of the breaking of the bread: "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf." (I Corinthians 10:16-17)

There is obviously more intended here than an apt illustration. Paul is not saying that the church is "like" a body. There is a close continuity between the man and the events which are summed up in the phrase, Jesus Christ, and the community of believers. But this continuity is not to be thought of as an exhaustive category, hence Paul's shifting in some sections to the usage that Christ is "head" of the body.

To equate the ongoing Church with the person of Christ leads to a spiritualizing evaporation of the meaning of the Only Begotten Son of God as the final and all-sufficient revelation of God. The Church is not just an extension of the Incarnation.

Far short of that heresy, however, is the essential truth that the brethren who are bound together in faith and are obedient to the gospel are closely identified with the Ever Living Christ. Where else can men look in history for the flesh-and-blood evidence of his

eternal life—in doctrine, in ceremony, in organization? All these give some testimony to his abidingness, but all of them are empty without the lives of the men who write the doctrine, or share in the ceremony, or administer the organization. And just as truly these lives are empty of him unless they be “in Christ,” as the New Testament continually insists is the proper term for belonging to him. The body of Christ says to us, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s distinction, that the Church is *person* and not institution.

Beyond that, this term for the Church says to us that the whole living history of what God did and is doing in the gift of Christ is contemporaneous in and with the life of those who become his through faith. Paul Minear, in *Eyes of Faith*, reminds us that the Jews characteristically thought of one man as embodying the whole race. Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah represented to the Jews both themselves and the whole race; and the figure of the Suffering Servant is always interpreted to be the people of Israel. There is a whole conception of social history implicit in the Church as the body of Christ—truly organic in that the individual Christian community incorporates the history of the whole species, and yet not at all organic if this is thought of as a kind of automatic reproduction. The seeds of the Holy Purpose are within the Church, but God controls the growth and the fruit.

CULTURE

The doctrine of the body of Christ runs bluntly against a doctrinaire view of history in our times that cannot accept it. This is a view that no longer completely dominates the academic field, but has become widely accepted as an unexamined premise of everyday life. It is that history essentially has no meaning save as a prelude to the here and now. All history is a collection of objectively verifiable facts about events that were essentially neutral when they happened. The men of the past put their own interpretations to work upon these facts and thus created the traditions and cultural values of civilization. But since we can see, looking backward, that these were only partial judgments, they are without commanding meaning to us. Therefore, to a large degree, they are unreal. The powerful realities of life are all encompassed in what is happening now, and education is to be conceived as an ever-widening exposure to the immediately experiential.

A classic statement of the basic purpose of education, widely held during the last thirty years, is found in L. Thomas Hopkins' *Interaction: The Democratic Process*:

The education of a child is an inclusive continuous process. It goes on all of the time anywhere and everywhere he may be. It is affected to some extent by every-

thing that is within his psychological field. . . . This process of relationship among individuals, young and old, is clearly defined for us as the democratic way of life. The quality of the child's total education is the quality of that democratic living. And the quality of his education through the school is judged by how well it squares with the principles of democratic living.¹

Hopkins then goes on to spell out the democratic way of life in terms of process and immediate satisfaction:

To achieve the good life the American people have wisely centered their attention upon the *process* of living. They realize that the way in which the good life of the present is achieved will determine whether any of it will exist for the future. The process of deriving the abundance of today may be the means toward the scarcity of tomorrow. The needs which the American people must satisfy in order to feel the goodness in the life are reasonably clear. They need (1) adequate food, shelter, and clothing to keep the body functioning effectively; (2) reasonable freedom of movement, speech, and thought; (3) some personal distinction before others; (4) acceptance by others into the activities of group life; (5) opportunity to build an unique self and personality; (6) favorable conditions for earning a livelihood; (7) economic security for old age; (8) opportunity to marry and rear children in a wholesome family life; (9) faith in

¹ L. Thomas Hopkins, *Interaction: The Democratic Process* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1941), p. 3. Used by permission.

their ability to make life continually better or faith that the best efforts of the group will bring the better life in the present and reveal new needs to raise their level of living in the future. . . .²

This philosophy of "nowness" just described is no longer unchallenged in educational circles, but it has been widely assimilated into the assumptions of American life. Or perhaps it is derivative from the frontier character of American life itself, and is still a part of our life even though the physical frontiers are largely behind us. When this mind-set is strong upon us, it is impossible for us to think of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in any other terms than a story from the past—a magnificent story surely, and one to be reckoned with because of the fresh judgment it brings whenever it is told. But when we assert in all seriousness that those who draw near to Christ in faith are bound together in a tie transcending time and space and that this is more important than belonging to the same social background, we seem to be talking sentimental nonsense.

This denial of authoritative meanings in the Christian interpretation of history, however, has not snuffed out the longing for meaning in events. The complex of contemporary life in America is taken as the norm of value—home and family, school, church and commu-

² *Ibid.*, p. 4f. Used by permission.

nity, individual freedom, prosperity, and peace. The point of view expressed by Dr. Hopkins is evidence of this. In addition we proceed cautiously into the past, glamorize and edit American history to enhance the worth of our own categories of judgment. Will Herberg, in *Catholic, Protestant, Jew*, documents the development of a religion of Americanism which is the real universal value structure of our people. He also points out that the resurgence of popularity for organized religion is a part of this universal religion. The three major religious traditions in America are felt to be of equal validity, just as long as they buttress a general religion of goodness, fair play, and morality. This reduces all religious traditions to ethical systems and folk legends which are ultimately of no decisive importance, except that one of them must be embraced.

Over against this, the Christian has to say that to belong to the church is to enter into a configuration of past and present which has a life of its own which shapes individual life and provides the only loyalty to which the whole human life can be given. To be in Christ is to take seriously the communion of the saints. To do this, it is necessary to embrace the central foolishness and scandal of the gospel, that is, that God entered into human history in the person of Jesus Christ, and that this was a decisive act for human history—decisive not only in the sense of its being historically influential but crucial and final in the ultimate

meaning of human life. All who through faith recognize this decisive event, acknowledge Christ to be the Lord of History. They draw nigh to him, and in a way enter into him. Such a belief is closely related to the Cross and the Resurrection. "Christ is risen. Christ lives," is the most ancient affirmation of the Christian church. All who respond to the power of that cry, not just in intellectual assent, but in the full giving of their lives to that one truth, are made one in him. "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Christ in some way lives in and through his church.

Such a belief, unfortunately, can also be distorted to a simple kind of pragmatism. Christ is reduced to a helpless, formless spirit, who is materialized only by the will of men who are followers of his ideals. Churchmen often "use" the image of Christ to urge the church to undertake this scheme or undergird that campaign.

To belong to the body of Christ does require obedience to the teaching of Christ, but its more profound meaning is that men and women are shaped by the Living Spirit of Christ. One receives from the whole Church, through the ages and in the present, more than can be given. In fact, one must receive first, before anything can be given.

The difficult hurdle for the modern man to get over is the shallow view that only the present is real. He cannot truly belong to the Church until he gives himself to the rich heritage of the Church, not out of anti-

quarian interest, but in the belief that time and space are obliterated in the kingdom of God.

There are few books more helpful in entering in upon such an understanding of the profound significance of Christian history than H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Meaning of Revelation*, as is evidenced by the following passages:

... It is one thing to perceive from a safe distance the occurrences in a stranger's life and quite a different thing to ponder the path of one's own destiny, to deal with the why and whence and whither of one's own existence. Of a man who has been blind and who has come to see, two histories can be written. A scientific case history will describe what happened to his optic nerve or to the crystalline lens, what technique the surgeon used or by what medicines a physician wrought the cure, through what stages of recovery the patient passed. An autobiography, on the other hand, may barely mention these things but it will tell what happened to a self that had lived in darkness and now saw again trees and the sunrise, children's faces and the eyes of a friend. Which of these histories can be a parable of revelation, the outer history or the inner one, the story of what happened to the cells of a body or the story of what happened to a self? When we speak of revelation in the Christian church we refer to our history, to the history of selves or to history as it is lived and apprehended from within.³

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 59, 60. By permission of The Macmillan Company.

The inspiration of Christianity has been derived from history, it is true, but not from history as seen by a spectator; the constant reference is to subjective events, that is, to events in the lives of subjects. What distinguishes such historic recall from the private histories of mystics is that it refers to communal events, remembered by a community and in a community. Subjectivity here is not equivalent to isolation, non-verifiability and ineffability; our history can be communicated and persons can refresh as well as criticize each other's memories of what has happened to them in the common life; on the basis of a common past they can think together about the common future.

Such history, to be sure, can only be confessed by the community, and in this sense it is esoteric. One cannot point to historic events in the lives of selves as though they were visible to any external point of view. Isaiah cannot say that in the year King Uzziah died God became visible in the temple nor Paul affirm that Jesus the Lord appears to travellers on the Damascus road. Neither will any concentration of attention on Isaiah and Paul, any detailed understanding of their historical situation, enable the observer to see what they saw. One must look with them and not at them to verify their visions, participate in their history rather than regard it if one would apprehend what they apprehended. The history of the inner life can only be confessed by selves who speak of what happened to them in the community of other selves.⁴

⁴ *Ibid.*, by permission of The Macmillan Company.

W. H. Auden has a comparatively new poem called "The Old Man's Road," which describes in nontheological language the experience of belonging to the ancient covenant in the midst of modernity—

Across the Great Schism through our whole landscape
Ignoring God's Vicar and God's Ape
Under their noses unsuspected,
The Old Man's Road runs as it did
When a light subsoil, a simple ore,
Were still in vogue, true to His wherefore
By stiles, gates, hedgecops it goes
Over ploughland, woodland, cow meadows
Past shrines to cosmological myth
No heretics today would be caught dead with
Near hilltop rings that were so safe then
Now stormed easily by small children.
Shepherds use bits in the high mountains
Hamlets take stretches for Lovers Lanes
Then through cities threads its odd way
Now without gutters, a Thieves Alley.
Now with green lamp posts and white curb
The Smart Crescent of a high toned suburb
Giving wide berth to an old cathedral
Running smack through a new town hall
Unlookable for, by logic, by guess
Yet some strike it and are struck fearless
No life can know, but no life

That sticks to its course can be made captive
And who wanders with it are not stopped at
Borders by guards of a Theocrat.
The Old Man leaves His Road to those
Who love it no less since it lost purpose
Who never ask what History is up to,
So cannot act as if they knew
Assuming a freedom its powers deny
Denying its Powers, they pass freely.⁵

The one place where poetry seems to take Mr. Auden astray from the meaning of the communion of the saints would seem to be in the couplet, "Who never ask what History is up to, so cannot act as if they knew." Part of the meaning of belonging to the body of Christ, is the belief that human history has a purpose, and that God will bring it to fulfillment. Auden seems to be using the word "history" here to refer to men's plans for historical change. This is an affirmation that the meaning of history lies in God's hands, not that history is meaningless.

The greatest single factor in helping the contemporary Church to understand what it means to belong to the body of Christ has been the growth of the ecumenical movement. As barriers of space and tradition have been transcended, time also has been somehow

⁵ W. H. Auden, "The Old Man's Road" (New York: Voyages Press, 1956). By permission of the publisher.

transcended. It is not possible for churches of different communions to draw closer together without serious examination of the dynamics of why they drew apart from one another. Thus it is that the theology and practice of the churches which are a part of the World Council of Churches become closely linked to the issues that faced the Church during the Reformation. It is amazing how timely are the problems regarding intercommunion over which Calvin and Luther wrestled. It is more amazing to discover how the centuries intervening have provided enough experience so that some of the theological problems of the Reformation can now be pressed to conclusions not possible then.

PRACTICE

And again what about the local church? How does it help people to understand that they are the body of Christ? One of the channels is certainly the one mentioned above. That is, through constant interpretation of the excitement of the coming great Church. This must go beyond the level where it so largely rests in the minds of many laymen, namely, that it is a good thing to co-operate, and that all differences of tradition and doctrine are nonessential.

Somehow churchmen must begin to wrestle with the problems of faith and order that have been largely relegated to high-level theological conferences. This

does run the risk of developing controversy between churches of differing denominations, and perhaps further increase of denominational chauvinism. Such a risk has to be taken, however. Coalitions between churches on the basis of the least common denominator of belief are not very sound evidences of Christian unity.

More than anything else, however, the local church, in its worship and in its corporate educational life should paint the glory of the gospel on the widest possible canvas of the church's history. The glorious color of the biblical message, and of Christendom through the ages, should be used with all the means at our command. Many churches in this time preach and teach as if the gospel were a set of ethical maxims sent to it from the denominational publishing house.

Let us never mistake erudition about sacred history for the reality of being in Christ. For he lives now as surely as with Paul or Augustine. Nevertheless, we are all so caught up in the things of this present age, that we may only be able to recognize the Lord of all time when we ourselves enter with imagination and expectancy into the communion of the saints.

This identification with the Church in other times ought to bring a perspective that will enable people to see the mission of the Church today. When one links arms with the "glorious company of the Apostles, the

goodly fellowship of the Prophets, and the noble army of Martyrs," it is necessary to try to keep step. For the Church, when it has been most faithful to her Lord, has not been preoccupied with defining just precisely how it was coterminous with the body of Christ, but has been transfixed by the remembrance of the broken body of Christ himself.

If the life of the Church is truly more personal than institutional, which is one of the implications of the designation, "body of Christ," then the self-giving crucified Christ can never be far from the center of the Church's life.

Missionary giving is the traditional way churches in our times express this obedience to the Christ who gave himself for them. Somehow, this has degenerated into such stereotyped conceptions of patronizing beneficence or sentimentality, that to suggest that the contents of the second side of the offering envelope is our response to the passion of Christ becomes sacrilegious. There is a growing understanding, particularly among younger churchmen and men of the younger churches, that the mission of the Church has to be seen as one enterprise, whether in plush American Suburbia or awakening Indonesia. When American church members begin to understand that the same forces of naturalism and secularism are the enemies of the Christian church at their doorstep as well as abroad, then the whole mis-

sionary enterprise of the Church will take on an immediacy worthy of being our response to Christ's sacrifice.

The whole traditional structure of missionary enterprise related to American churches stands in a very precarious position right now. The vigor of the last century has hardened in so many places around the world into institutions of Christian philanthropy that new approaches to evangelism, completely outside the traditional structure, are necessary. This is as true of home missions as of foreign missions. Only the growth of the awareness that the mission is one, in the local church, in specialized fields at home and overseas, will give the energy that is needed.

This is surely difficult to communicate to a comfortable, well-budgeted middle-class church. One of the greatest burdens borne by the American missionary today is the obligation to make missionary addresses in the churches "supporting his work." The far-away look in the eye, the curious relish of the idiosyncracies of the people of the mission field, and the note of thankfulness that someone is brave enough to live so heroically are what usually face him across the lectern in the Ladies' Parlor.

Yet the twin of every problem the missionary faces daily sits facing him—carefully hidden by bright smiles of gentility—yet very much there. And over the heads

of the ladies he can sometimes see the smokestacks of a mill out on strike, or the distant barrier of railroad telegraph lines that mark the place where social intercourse ends.

CHAPTER III

The Authority of the Word and the Church Program

EPISODE

The Rev. Mr. William Green was preparing himself for a most difficult interview. He paced up and down the living room of the rectory. As he approached the closed dining-room door on one of the journeys around the room, he was amused to hear his wife admonishing the children, "Now stay out of there and don't bother Daddy. He's got an appointment with a problem."

If only Marguerite Lighthouse weren't such a really nice person, so that he could work up some angry resistance to the ideas she was pushing. She was really devoted to the church too, and he knew there was a minimum of ego involvement in this latest proposal. She was just an enthusiast, and the whole town knew that it was almost impossible to stand in the way of one of Miss Lighthouse's pet projects.

Bill Green sat down at the desk and picked up the neatly typed sheets of paper that Miss Lighthouse had given him the Sunday before. It was a proposal to work out a new curriculum for the church school. Miss Lighthouse was chairman of the Christian Education Committee of the church. Everyone thought the church was extremely fortunate to have her in that position, since she was the head of the guidance department of the local high school.

And she had been a good choice. Bill was grateful for the way she had taken up the problems of securing Sunday School teachers with the same efficiency that she brought to every enterprise entrusted to her. But this thing, this latest brainstorm that had hit her while she was away at summer school, was the end. Bill wondered how he could make clear to her that he wasn't skeptical of it because he felt defensive about the present curriculum of religious education in the church. He was sure that Marguerite's feeling about the deadness of the whole thing was quite right. But the outline he held in his hand was far worse. It seemed to be compounded of a mixture of group dynamics, pseudo psychology and nature worship. It purported to be a plan for reorganization of method, but actually was an outline of a general religious belief bordering on a substitute for the Christian faith.

The doorbell interrupted his unhappy thoughts. He went to the door and welcomed his expected visitor.

As they came back into the living room, chatting about the weather and the reopening of school, Bill could see that Marguerite's usual supreme self-possession and poise were a little unsteady today.

She came to the point quickly.

"Mr. Green, I've been thinking it was a little presumptuous of me to suggest such sweeping changes. I hope you're not offended."

"Don't be silly, Marguerite. I'm pleased that you are concerned enough to spend so much time working on plans for improvement in the church school." He hoped that this did not seem to commit him to approval of the idea.

Apparently it did, for she went on to say, "I'm glad you feel that way, Mr. Green. Of course we might not be able to put all these changes into effect all at once, but at least we have a master plan, a blueprint toward which to work. I tell you, Mr. Green, I got so excited about some of the things I learned at summer school that it just made me unhappy to think of what our own children and youth were missing in our church. They have such a limited experience, and the world is so wide. We must allow them to expand their horizons, to participate fully in the wonders of this modern world. It came to me all of a sudden—while I was listening to a sermon at the university church, as a matter of fact—that what we needed was a much broader program of activities."

The minister stalled for time by going to the door and asking his wife if she would bring in some tea. Should he hedge in expressing his real opinion, and pass the buck in a sudden remembrance that, after all, the whole committee would have to be informed before any discussion could take place? He knew that Marguerite Lighthouse would never fall for that dodge. So he decided to speak frankly.

"Marguerite, please don't misunderstand what I'm going to say. And don't interpret it as being complacency about the present situation. But this church school that you describe here wouldn't be a church school. It could just as easily be the program of a good settlement house or the Ethical Culture Society." He saw her raise her hand to protest, and so he went hurriedly on, "Oh, I know there would be references to Jesus and the good life and the beauty of God's world, but that isn't enough. And I'm not opposed to activity either. But it's all a question of where you begin. What are the sources of the church's life? What is our basic authority and our charter, if you will? That doesn't seem to be very clear in this document."

Marguerite didn't reply to the question. "I gather you don't like it," she said drily. Bill was sure that he had failed to communicate his real concern, and that he had merely succeeded in offending this lady for whom he had great respect.

But Marguerite recovered quickly and went on, "I'm

not sure I know what you mean, Mr. Green. I'll have to think about it. I think I believe, in answer to your question, that good educational procedures and good program planning are self-validating. They lead people to a better way of life."

Bill said, "You know, somehow I feel very much frustrated right now. I feel sure that I have completely failed to convey to this church a most important fact. That is, that we are not free to pick and choose at random the program into which we throw the energy of the church. We are all under the authority of the Word of God."

The discussion went on for some hours.

THE DOCTRINE

The third term brought to liveliness in recent discussion of the meaning of the Church is not a New Testament definition, but stems from the Reformation period. That is Calvin's measure for the authenticity of a Christian gathering calling itself a church, "where the Word of God is preached and heard, and the sacraments rightly administered." This standard emerged from the troubled morass in which the Church found itself in a time long after the apostolic age. The Word of God was so powerfully pervasive in the early church, both in remembered word and present deed, that no test needed to be applied. Whatever vagaries the early church got into in its daily encounter with the pagan

world, and whatever heretical notions threatened it, the Word of God as the authoritative category of church life was not seriously questioned. There was often disagreement as to how this Word was known, but there was little question that divine action was the source of the Church's authority; for the Word of God was Christ himself, and his leadership in and through the Church did not have to be defended.

In the sixteenth century, and certainly in our times, the question of the authority of the Christian gospel was and is seriously questioned. The appurtenances of the medieval Church were defended as self-validating in Calvin's time. In our day the consensus of pragmatic cultural opinions is asserted as the validating norm of value and belief. Thus the church must surely be defined as the place where the essential, independent, and decisive action which God brought about in Christ is clearly asserted and accepted. This obedience to the Word, that is, the life of the church constantly bringing itself under the judgment of Christ, is what Protestantism has felt is the surest way to keep the church worthy of its Lord. This Word of God is brought to the church, ever renewed through constant attendance upon the Holy Scriptures, preaching closely related to the Scriptures, and the sacraments. These are the ways provided through which the Word of God rings with most regular authenticity and integrity. Some have been able to recognize as the uplifting of the Word of

God the words of the Bible, interpreted or "broken open" through faithful preaching in the spirit of Christ. Others find it easier to recognize the Word in visible form and action in the sacraments. Here, on levels of perception and reception beyond the verbal, the grace of God is mediated to those who by faith know that Christ has opened this way for their saving health.

It is essential to the very power of the Word, administered through *both* preaching and sacrament, that the initiative of God in Christ be recognized, and that efficacy not be tied to the state of mind of those receiving the Word.

However, the belief in the objective quality of the transmission of the Word can be so woodenly held that it misses the real point that it is the living Christ who is offering himself through these means. The worship of the Bible or of the sacraments as the final and only repository of God's grace misses this point disastrously.

CULTURE

This essentially pragmatic test of the authenticity of any group calling itself a church in terms of faithfulness to the Word of God is the strongest safeguard against the church falling victim to metaphysical pragmatism. That is, there is strong pressure in the American scene to exalt activity and interest itself as the sufficient test of the worthwhileness of any enterprise. If people are attending meetings, volunteering their

time, enjoying their participation, then this often seems to justify the organization. Such a philosophy of business is widespread in the life of the church, and there are few people who are completely immune from its cogent persuasion. Thus, any kind of heresy can be preached or paraded in the church, if people like it.

The two kinds of churches which most easily seem to fall victim to the idea that "anything goes, as long as there is a crowd" are the old established city churches losing their congregations and bright new churches in the suburbs. Old churches can often find a new following if a persuasive spellbinder offers attractive homilies directed toward the assuaging of bodily and mental ills. The cities are filled with lonely people who find comfort or excitement in such a display, albeit not necessarily the glad good news of Christ.

New suburban churches are often put in the embarrassing position of not being able to cope with the great number of people who want to join them. Organizing meetings are held, ministers settled, new buildings erected, and a Sunday School and congregation of several hundred gathered, often without any large number of those who participate knowing any more about the Christian church than what they had gleaned from *Life* magazine and *Reader's Digest*. Governing boards of new churches sometimes consist of people who have had a great deal more experience with the

Boy Scouts, the U. S. Army, and college fraternities than with the Christian church.

In such an atmosphere it is no wonder that some rather bizarre activities are held under the banner of the church. Women's societies may even escape the dragnet of the national denominational scheme for yearly mission emphasis, and plan a whole year's program around the free movies and demonstrations made available by commercial concerns. A movie on "How Excelsior Chemicals Are Made" may be separated from the meeting with the lady demonstrator of Super Duper Vitamin Tested Aluminum Sheet Cook Ware only by an inspirational talk on Prayer by the minister's wife.

Churches with established memberships are not necessarily secure from wandering in fields far from Christian truth, but the lack of pressure on them often means they follow denomination and traditional program ideas as the easiest way of doing things.

This role of denominational pressure in building local church program must also be noted. Most denominational program planning and promotion boards are determined to organize the local church so that it will be: (a) well informed about the denominational missionary program; (b) efficient in raising its local budget and missionary giving through carefully tested plans; (c) comprehensive in closely graded Christian education for children; (d) enthusiastic but well disciplined in increasing the number of church members. There is

no question about the deep dedication and sincerity with which denominational leaders press themselves into the building of over-all campaigns, crusades, themes, and emphases year after year. Indeed, the output of slick paper brochures, turn-over charts, posters, pledge cards, and manuals by all the major denominations added together would make an impressive pile in the midst of an advertising agency office. Despite the sincerity of the efforts and the orthodox piety of the language, one gets the impression that this gigantic sales job may seem very different in the Christian churches in the back country of Georgia or the plains of Nebraska from what was intended in New York or Philadelphia or Cleveland. Mass produced programs to evangelize America, or put out an Every Member Canvass Plan in Every Church may miss by a mile serving the purposes of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, one very articulate layman in a smart Connecticut town dumped a whole packet on his pastor's desk one day, and, declared, with feeling, "I'm done with the church if it doesn't stop swallowing Madison Avenue junk like everyone else."

There is then the restraining function of the Word of God upon the program plans of the local church. But there is also the much more important energizing role. Here is the area where the faithful planning and creative imagination of the members is of first importance. After all, *koinonia* is a gift by grace from God

and cannot be built. No group of people can constitute themselves the body of Christ. But both things are possible through God's action when men and women assemble to hear the Word of God and join together in the sacraments. These are the banks of the channel of God's grace which men must tend.

The most difficult part about it, however, is for people to accept the reality of a given Word of God, if it is not presented as literal Biblicism or the pronouncements of an infallible church. That is why the resurgence of biblical theology in our day is of so much significance to churches that have a Reformation heritage. For, like our fathers before us, we have discovered that the Bible is the most authentic vessel of the Word of God. We have come through strenuous decades of the most minute dissection of the text and background of the Scriptures, to discover that the Word that is written here shines with greater clarity than ever before. More than that, the message of an undivided Word—God creating and redeeming men—transcends all the variety represented by the differences in time and occasion when the various books were written.

There is this given Word, then, of a God in covenant with his people and making the covenant incarnate in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, who lives forever. This is the test question that must be asked, "Does what we are doing testify to the living Christ?" More than that, the Bible provides almost infinite detail and

variation as to the implications of this test. We are not left with a category or a proposition from which didactic material must be deduced. We are given a kingdom of human experience with divine grace to enlighten us and encourage us.

PRACTICE

In the local church, the authority of the Word of God must be seen foremost in relation to the corporate worship of the people and the teaching ministry of the church.

The most encouraging thing about the increasing interest in religion in America, is that church attendance is rising, even in the face of increased radio and TV religious programs. Despite the mixture of reasons why this is so, surely one of the most important is that people find something in the gathering of themselves together to worship God that cannot be duplicated anywhere else. Here this zeal for uniqueness of experience noted in the first chapter is not misplaced. And the churches must not fail to insure careful stewardship of this most precious gift, the Word of God broken open in words and sign. The worst temptation to the church as far as worship is concerned is to think of it as essentially a time for subjective rumination. Christian worship is exactly the opposite of this. It is action and deed, in which the power of God's grace is poured out in preaching and sacrament and to which the people respond in

repentance, thanksgiving, and commitment. We have been taught through long years of preoccupation with the nineteenth century ideology of the Will, that worship is a preparation for life. That is, that we gird ourselves for the real battle by talking ideals to ourselves and pressing our thoughts toward courageous deeds. May it not be that life is a preparation for worship? That is, that the daily deed of earning bread and the holy deed of waiting upon the Lord in company with his church flow in together. One is not rehearsal for the other. The worship of the Christian church must have this sturdiness about it that comes from a frequent mixture of the earthy problems of life with the promises of the Most Holy God.

It is interesting to note the significant liturgical movements now going on within the various branches of Christendom. Those churches which have always maintained their ties with the historic fabric of Christian liturgy going back to the first century, but which had lost the spontaneity and liveness of that first century are rediscovering it to some extent. This is signaled by the new emphasis on preaching in churches where the sermon has been allowed to wither away into hortatory remarks. Also there is the replacement of the altar with its back affixed to the wall by the older free standing table of the Lord, symbolizing the fact that the sacrament is valid only when surrounded by the people of God, in the midst of the believers.

Those churches which are heirs of the left wing of the Reformation, and for two centuries have prized the preached word over anything else, are rediscovering their own legitimate liturgical heritage. This is a heritage which sees the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as one of the two great centers of worship. Often this sacrament had degenerated into a mere memorial meal in which Jesus was revered and remembered, but which was dependent for its efficacy upon the emotional state of those attending.

Historic Christian worship has an irreducible pattern of essentials which has an integrity of its own. There are two root sources of this pattern, the synagogue service of attendance upon the reading and hearing of the Law, and the upper-room supper of the Lord. In the first-generation church these two acts of corporate worship were separate services, but within the first century they came together into one service. This service, however, had two distinct parts. The first was the liturgy of the word, in which Scripture was read and expounded, and prayers of confession, thanksgiving, and intercession were said. The second part was the liturgy of the faithful in which Holy Communion was observed. Through the centuries many changes have taken place to exalt one part or the other of this old unity, and doctrinal differences within Christendom have considerably modified the simple movement of the service. Yet Christian worship is barren without

this full-orbed pattern—which includes the breaking open of the Scripture in prophetic preaching, prayers of adoration, of confession, thanksgiving, and intercession, in which the people share, and the administration of the sacraments. It may not be feasible to have Communion every Sunday, but a frequent observance is necessary, and even on the occasions when it is not held, the congregation still is reminded of its normative position through the offertory and prayers of intercession.

One of the stubborn obstacles to vital worship in many churches is the unspoken assumption that a worship service is a program or a performance to be observed. People come without any specific understanding of their role except that they are hopeful that something will be said or done that will move them or interest them.

There is need to recapture that sense of movement, of drama, in which the congregation has an important function of response and participation in order to make the whole service an offering to God. To this end, the restoration of congregational singing as one of the major ways in which the congregation responds to the Word, and offers up its praise, is long overdue. An anthem by the choir, no matter how skilled, can never substitute for the hymn. Evelyn Underhill, writing about the genius of early Lutheran worship, says this:

The preacher may scatter the Word; but the chorale gathers the faithful together around the treasure of life which it contains, and breaks down as nothing else can do, the isolation of the soul. One might almost say that the chorale creates the Protestant congregation.¹

When a congregation understands that it has a deed to perform together when it worships, then it can become eagerly attendant to that which God offers in the service. The minister, understanding this, is driven back to confront more seriously the stewardship he undertakes when he preaches from the Word and administers the sacrament.

Preaching that is rigorously faithful to the central biblical themes of creation, judgment, redemption, and resurrection, is one of the great needs of the American church. This kind of preaching must not be equated with philosophical treatises upon doctrine, but saturated with all the imagination that is necessary to really break open these themes at the points where people may feed on them. The starting point, however, is the biblical message and not the current enthusiasm of the minister.

If the Lord's Supper is indeed the Word made visible, we must learn to come to it with eye open and heart unlatched. The table of the Lord is not the place to indulge in gymnastics of rationalization. It is a time

¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p. 279. Used by permission.

for solemnity and reverent fear of God, certainly, but it is overwhelmingly a time of joy and satisfaction when we receive the holy elements which mediate the unspeakable grace of God. "Lift up your hearts." "We lift them to the Lord."

When the bread is broken, and the cup poured out, a deed is done that declares the everlasting efficacy of God's work in the gift of Christ. Here, gathered with our neighbors and brethren, we cannot escape the impact of Paul's charge that we are the body of Christ. For is this not his body broken for us, and his blood poured out for the remission of our sins?

Baptism, the other sacrament of reformed Christendom, is equally a nonverbal illustration of God's grace, as a person is received into the household of faith. Whether it is given in infancy, and confirmed in childhood, or administered at an age of decision in childhood, it is still a sign of God's initiative and man's acceptance of that act.

If the corporate worship of the congregation is indeed an objective act with its own integrity, then it behooves a people to resist fanciful embroidering of the service. This does not mean that art and decoration should not be used as servants to this work of worship. It does mean, however, that they should be servants. Aesthetic judgments should never be the sole nor the determinative judgments in the ordering of the service or the decorating of the church.

We are dismayed by some of the architectural horrors that were built as churches fifty years ago. We are continuing to build, at an accelerated rate, bright new buildings, many of which will be so regarded twenty-five years hence. This is because congregations do not themselves understand the full purpose of their worship, so they do not insist that the architects they employ spend some time in theological consultation.

The authority of the Word, however, is not limited to the public services of worship. All the other activities of the church must measure their purposes against it. The teaching ministry of the church must particularly be conscious of what is centrally to be taught and the urgency of its message. The curriculum of the church school has been particularly vulnerable over the years to the vagaries of secular educational theory. Desiring the best educational methods, church educators often adopted an implicit metaphysics of naturalism as a part of the method. This tendency has certainly been recognized in recent years, and nearly all the major denominations have recast their church school curriculums so that the gospel is clearly presented as well as the best educational theory consulted.

The area where there is least being done, and perhaps the greatest need exists, is in adult education in the church. The continuous opening up of the gospel to the members of the church in ways that are appropriate ought to be one of the major tasks of the church

program. It is too true that adults in many churches of our country never meet together except for Sunday worship or in organizational meetings largely devoted to the business of running the church. The complaint is often heard that we do not give new church members enough things to do to keep them interested. The partial truth in this observation, however, is overridden by the fact that we never give them any opportunity to discuss the central meaning of the faith they have espoused in a formal setting.

One of the clues to the reason that this is true is the frequent failure of the more formal adult religious education. With rare exception, adult Sunday School classes are considered by the average layman to be opportunities in the church he does not particularly desire. The decline of the midweek meeting is due, of course, to the increased pressure of daily life, but also to the deadly stereotyped procedure which it often followed.

Perhaps it is time to launch a new kind of adult education based on informal small groups meeting together to study a given body of material for a stated length of time. Many churches are finding this a means to teach laymen who have always shied away from more formal setups, and also to give the opportunity for the growth of close personal acquaintanceship between members on the level of deep concerns.

Three kinds of groups ought to exist in the church.

One kind is a basic orientation study class which is frankly to lay out the main doctrines of the Christian church. This may very well be done in a more formal setting, although even here, it is better when people feel uncoerced by the habits of their childhood, and can speak freely and honestly.

Second, in addition to the survey course, study groups concentrating on one specific area of doctrine, like the nature of man, Jesus Christ, Christian ethics, or on the thought of one theologian, are valuable. Such a group should meet for a definitely scheduled period of time, for example, six weeks, and then be reconstituted.

The third kind of group begins not so much with doctrine, but with the revelatory literature of our own times, such as plays, novels, nonfiction documentaries. Study that begins in such an area often permits people to speak more freely about their real feelings and questions. Theological insight then comes in response to these questions and in dialogue with the real dynamics of modern life.

It would seem that the opening of the Word of the Christian heritage in theology and in art, drama, and literature, must become an important manifesto for the whole program of the church. Organizations which exist because of old loyalties may very well be filled with new purpose if they are seen as opportunities of teaching and for exposure to Christian culture. So

much of the emotional energies which belong to the important area of man's aesthetic appreciation is drained off in the fantastic world of mass entertainment in our day. We need to introduce into our churches a competence that will help them to make discriminating Christian judgments and bring Christian appreciation to the religiously significant aspects of our culture. It is not a secondary matter that third-rate illustration and art forms in so many churches and adoption of the cheapest kind of television entertainment are the major forms borrowed from the world of the lively arts.

Concentration on study in the field of theology and culture need not be highbrow or pretentious. Perhaps one of the surest ways to the redevelopment of a self-conscious Christian community within a pluralistic culture is the training of knowing laymen who can make theological judgments. In a speech before the Knights of Columbus, Seventy-fourth Supreme Convention on August 21, 1956, the Most Rev. Alexander M. Zaleski, Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit, told the group that the love of study must be one of the major duties of Catholic laymen. He told them that they must be "men of study and research."

Richard Niebuhr, in his report submitted to the Secretariat for Evangelism of the World Council of Churches on *Who Are the Unbelievers and What Do They Believe?* writes:

The rate of religious and particularly Christian illiteracy in a population that by and large regards itself as Christian is very high. Little biblical knowledge can be counted upon among church members and non members alike. The Christian faith is intimately connected with a theology that the Church teaches something relatively specific about God, man and the future; that Christianity is not only belief but understanding in the light of belief; not only a code of ethics but an orientation in nature and history. . . .²

To the end that Christians may find the measure of their separateness and the direction of their mission, the authority of the Word of God must rule the Church.

² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Who Are the Unbelievers and What Do They Believe?* Report from the Survey on Evangelism, p. 36, published in *The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955). By permission of the U. S. Conference for the World Council of Churches.

CHAPTER IV

No Salvation Outside the Church and Evangelism

EPISODE

"You know, I like that guy," Joe Martinson acknowledged to his two friends across the corner of the bar where they were standing. Joe was assistant to the leader of the West End Political Club which had its headquarters upstairs. He was talking about the Rev. Henry Bates, who had just left them. Tony and Clem nodded and savored their beer.

"And the boss likes him, too," Joe went on to say. "Can you imagine him listening to a preacher about what's good for this precinct? You know how he hates that do-gooder bunch which always meets over at the library. But this Bates, he's something else again."

"What's he want to see the Boss about this time, Joe?" Tony asked.

"He's got an idea about forming some sort of job-sponsoring committee for the kids who quit school, or

get back from the Army, or are out on parole. He wants the Boss to get the business men in the Club to take up the idea. I guess he'd like some co-operation from the D.A.'s office too."

"You think the Boss will buy the idea, Joe?" Tony asked.

"Hell, I don't know. But Bates don't ever bother him with just any old idea. He knows what the Boss will think is good politics as well as good for people. He's a smart cookie."

Clem spoke for the first time. "What's his racket, Joe? I mean, what's he after? Nobody works that hard for just nothing."

Joe asked, "What do you mean, Clem? He's a preacher. He's supposed to help people."

Clem explained, "You know what I mean. He isn't like any of the other preachers around here. Why, that old mission has been standing on that corner ever since we were kids, and nobody ever saw the other preachers around the neighborhood, except talking to the kids or old ladies. They spent all their time running basketball leagues and preaching and praying, or something. Now, all of a sudden during the last four years this guy Bates is hanging around down at Flaminsky's Garage, and coming in here, and getting cozy with the Boss. I don't get it."

"I tell you he's just a good guy, Clem. I think he does those things because he likes to. I got to admit he used

to make me pretty uncomfortable. It gives you kind of a chill to have a preacher around when you want to let loose and relax."

Tony spoke up, "Yeah, what's the problem, Clem? What are you suspicious of?"

"Well, look at the whole thing, you guys. It isn't just Bates. There are three or four guys joined the club last year who are members of that mission church. And I even heard that Gus Mikelson and his family are going to that church. He's an old-time club member. Why is that mission suddenly so interested in politics, and in guys like hang out down at Flaminsky's?"

Joe went back to the cigarette machine, and when he came back he moved in between Tony and Clem on the short side of the bar, where he could see out the window.

"You think Bates is trying to convert us or something?" he asked. Through the window he could see the minister standing on the front steps of the mission in earnest conversation with a young couple.

"Well, why else does he spend so much time with people who don't go to that mission, and with people who aren't even of his religion, or any religion at all, for that matter? You say he don't want to take over the club. We all know he's not running a racket. He's out to save our souls."

Tony looked uncertainly from Joe to Clem. He gen-

erally believed what Joe said about everything. But what Clem said sounded convincing. Still, he tried a halfhearted protest. "But he never talks religion. He's never passed me no tract. Are you sure, Clem?"

Joe reacted angrily, "Of course he's not sure. You're just suspicious of everyone, Clem. Why, wouldn't I know if some preacher was working me over? Wouldn't the Boss know?"

This silenced all three of them for a few minutes, but each had his own thoughts. These all had something to do with Henry Bates, but even more to do with a shrugged-off religion, and a mixture of fear and anger that maybe someone was really trying to invade that forbidden area of their lives.

Henry Bates walked down the street with the couple. They left him at the corner and, as he returned to the mission, he waved at the men in the bar.

"Smile at the padre, Joe. You'll be a deacon in his church some day," Clem said.

"Shut up, damn you, Clem. That guy's my friend. He's got no leash hidden behind his back for me."

"I don't think you can ever trust them completely. If you're a good Christian, wouldn't you have to believe that everybody outside the church is damned? Wouldn't you be working all the time to get everybody to join?"

Tony looked anxiously from one to the other.

DOCTRINE

Is there salvation outside the church? Or in other words, are the decisive matters of ultimate relationship between men and God unalterably restricted to the dominion of the church? This is crucial because the cosmopolitan nature of our times makes it incomprehensible to moderns that this frail segment of society should be "the sphere of justification and the realm of redemption." Churchmen themselves, anxious lest our world discount the character of God on the basis of the poor stewardship of the church, are not willing to give an unqualified "no" to the question. On the other hand, the Scripture plainly indicates that the way of reconciliation with God is completely in and through Christ and not in the great undistributed abundance of general providence.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. . . ." (John 6:44)

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19)

If the church is the body of Christ, in *any* essential way, then for better or for worse, this is where men must look for the reception of the grace of God.

This dilemma has led to prolonged speculation in all the centuries since the Reformation about the visible

and invisible Church. For surely all that is known to the experiences of men in church life does not exhaust the opportunities that God provides in Christ for the world. And yet just as surely, to begin to define these other areas of the sure presence of the indwelling Christ outside the Church is to court a presumptuous pantheism. The words "visible" and "invisible" have had different meanings to various traditions. To the Lutherans, visibility and invisibility were thought to apply to the same church at various times. That is, here the stuff of the great Church of God is truly a part of the life of this community of belief, and here there is a barren time when it is as if the essence of what makes the Church had gone underground. However, the power of the Church is always latent even if "hidden" or invisible.

In the Reformed tradition the distinction is much more closely related to time. The visible church refers to the existing, living fellowship, while the term "the invisible Church" is reserved for the communion of saints, the Church in all places and all ages.

One thing is certain, that whenever the church centers its attention on drawing exact lines, as to who is included within the sphere of God's grace and who is excluded from it, it travels a dangerous road.

It is necessary to begin to take the doctrine of election seriously and to see what it is saying essentially. The Reformed emphasis on election was far removed

from setting earthly measures of who qualifies for God's favor and who is beyond the pale. This is sometimes what happened as a derivative result. The main thrust of Calvin's doctrine of election, however, was that the lines of grace were completely in the hands of God. This did not mean that he was a capricious God, one who established his way of reconciliation through his Son, and then flaunted his own covenant with the church. But the initiative and the surety of any man's ultimate encounter with the Almighty lay with the Almighty.

What then of the good man, or the man struggling with the fundamental questions of life and death, who cannot see the church on the corner as having anything to offer in this struggle? And what then of the man without faith who finds himself a pillar of the local church because of custom and environment? Even more crucial, what is the basic drive of evangelism, if it is not to confront men with the decisive importance of Christ in their lives—lives within the church?

These questions can be faced only in the light of an understanding of the meaning of salvation which is both dynamic and theological. A typographical error in the first draft of the manuscript of this chapter illustrates the difficulty of such an understanding. The title was first typed as "No Solution Outside the Church." Too frequently we have come to think of salvation as heavenly bookkeeping—a rational assur-

ance of an eternal safe conduct pass. Rather salvation is best understood dynamically in relation to saving health—the content and fruit of a life rooted in faith. Thus, to assert that there is no ultimate salvation outside the church is to assert the power of God through the Holy Spirit in the community of those who believe.

CULTURE

There are few things more offensive to the respectable, well-situated American than the feeling that he is being evangelized. It is an affront to the notion that democracy means that everyone's traditional religious heritage is equal to that of everyone else. Evangelization, in addition, always appears to the unevangelized as an occasion in which someone is going to try to alter one's inner life, to make an assault on a façade that has been carefully maintained. Christian evangelism is linked in the public mind with violent revivalism, and excessive public display of emotion which ends in compliant submission to a pious life of no drinking, no smoking, no profanity. Even when a representative of the church does not seem to epitomize this picture, he is suspected of putting on a disguise in order to catch people off their guard.

No aspect of the church's life has become more of a caricature or has fallen into more rigidity of expression than its evangelistic efforts. Revivalism developed a pattern of customs and inflexible traditions that are

familiar to everyone. The reaction against revivalism and the search for alternatives have produced just as heavyhanded methods. Visitation evangelism is widely hailed as "the" alternative to revivalism, and is accepted as such by most of the denominations. What does this mean in practice? It is a carefully devised plan for making calls on families not related officially to the church, to seek their membership. Now no one will quarrel with the necessity for church people to engage in regular visitation upon their neighbors. However, there is basic confusion in the literature of visitation evangelism concerning the purpose of these calls. The preamble and stated purpose of the plan inevitably talks about saving the lost, making an assault upon unbelief so that men may know Christ as Lord and Savior. When the details of how "the call" is to be made are outlined, however, it usually seems to be in terms of "selling" church membership on any basis that seems appealing to the customer. The final steps in a "Road Map of an Evangelistic Interview" are outlined below:

6. Advance the appeal. This is somewhat like prescribing for the patient after you have seen the symptoms. In your period of exploration you have been thinking about what appeal you believe will most effectively reach this person. An appeal is a reaction or a motivation for accepting the Christian faith. Generally speaking, there are four classes of appeals. They are to be used *one at a time*, never all together. To do so only

confuses the issue. If it is apparent that you missed the boat in picking the first one, abandon it completely. Don't mention it again. Try another. You will rarely have time for more than two. Make your choice wisely. Helpful appeals for beginning the Christian life are these:

- A. The appeal to *Conscience*. "Does it not seem to you that you *ought* to be a Christian?"
- B. The appeal to the *Christian Home*. "You have told me about the Christian home in which you were reared. Does it not seem that you ought to give your children the same chance that you had?"
- C. The appeal to *Service*. This is useful to people of obvious gifts and abilities.
- D. The appeal on the basis of *World Conditions*. This is useful to those who seem to have a lively sense of what is going on in the world.

Visit with some leisure of spirit about the appeal under discussion. Give your prospects time. Don't argue, certainly not theological fine points. Leave that for the experts.

- 7. Close the interview carefully. Only experience can tell you when it is time to close. Once you have seen it, you will not miss it. Proper use of the Commitment Card makes this easy.
- 8. Pray. Every successful interview ends at the foot of the Cross.¹

¹ "Road Map of an Evangelistic Interview," by Harold B. Williams, *Shepherds* (magazine), Nashville, Tenn., Summer, 1956. By permission of the editor.

Such appeals would seem to be less than they ought to be on two grounds:

First, they do not really seem to be based on a belief that the church is *the* sphere of justification and salvation. There is no compelling sense of urgency about such a presentation of the gospel. Underlying this approach is the modus of salesmanship technique in which the assumption is implicit that the "product" is not really necessary in its own right to the person, but can perhaps be made to seem so.

In fact, most appeals to churchmanship are tuned to the comparative mood in adjectives. The Religion in American Life, which is an interdenominational and interfaith promotion program backed by the Advertising Council of America, uses as its current slogan (on billboards, postcards, bumpers, letterheads, stickers, menus, and posters), "Build a *stronger, richer* life. . . . Worship together every week."

What of the life that knows there is no strength in it? What of the life that cannot comprehend its own poverty because it is so surfeited? Thus there is a kind of empty carton of clichés, new and old, that is peddled in the name of evangelism. Where is the Christ of Gethsemane and Calvary? Where is the offer of divine forgiveness that makes all the difference in the world?

Probably it is not discussed in the evangelism manuals, because of the second appalling weakness in our evangelism attempts. That is, there is no under-

standing of the complex interweaving of post-Christian wistfulness, outright paganism, and pseudo religiosity that makes up the thinking and living of our time. If men and women in the church themselves do not really believe that the church is a divine act, what empowers them to be evangelists in its behalf? They can be no more than salesmen for its sterling qualities. They must reduce evangelism to the simple transaction of getting more members with the pious hope that "something" will happen to these people once they become regular attendants.

If churchmen really do stake their lives on the church, then they are freer to admit her weakness and corruption—to marvel at her power despite "the storm without and the stench within." They are also freer to become really involved in the problems of the world outside the church and to be witnesses to the incarnate Christ instead of salesmen impatient to ring two more doorbells this evening; for true evangelism is a delicate and time-consuming art in our day. If we proceed on the assumption that we still live in a world that is really Christendom but with small spots of disaffection and secularism, then a snappy talk about the benefits of church membership is in order. However, if we realize that Christendom no longer exists, but only small isolated islands of Christian culture which float in the vast sea of every kind of human passion, then witnessing to Christ becomes a lifetime job of the most

intense kind of identification with the people outside the church. This kind of evangelism knows that the communication between men in our day is becoming excruciating and desperate unsuccess. Old catch phrases are worse than useless. They set up barriers that can never be surmounted. Only men and women who are willing to open their own personal lives to others in ways that may cause embarrassment or invite abuse, in absolute candor, and frank humanity, can be evangelists for the church in our day. We cannot point to the all-sufficient Christ, if there is the slightest hint that we think we have managed to co-opt a little of that sufficiency and are willing to pass it on. We cannot talk about the depth of human sin to which Christ comes with forgiveness, if we are not willing to acknowledge our own weakness and sin to others.

D. T. Niles says it precisely:

Evangelism is witness. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food. The Christian does not offer out of his bounty. He has no bounty. The evangelistic relation is to be "alongside of" not "over-against." The Christian stands alongside the non Christian and points to the Gospel, the holy action of God.²

Such a conception of evangelism knows that the incidence of failure to success will be very high. More

² Daniel T. Niles, *That They May Have Life*, published for the Student Volunteer Movement for Christian Missions (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), p. 96. By permission of Harper & Brothers.

than that, it comprehends the irony that the stern reasons that keep many people out of the church are reflections of a very high view of the church. Some people will not settle for an institutional credit card as far as the church is concerned. They are on a search, a desperate journey for truth that will not be satisfied by dead monuments to truth. Tennessee Williams presents such a group of people in his play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Here are a father and son, the older one successful in the world because he has never for a moment confused truth with convention and public manners, and the young man an alcoholic wreck before he is thirty because he had not been able to accept the distinction. The father says at one point:

"... the human animal is a beast that dies and if he's got money he buys and buys and buys and I think the reason he buys everything he can buy is that in the back of his mind he has the crazy hope that one of his purchases will be life everlasting!"³

Evangelism has to come to terms with the honest doubts of people outside the church that are often more appropriate offerings to God than the protestations of piety within.

Julian Hartt writes, in *Toward a Theology of Evangelism*:

³ P. 73, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, by Tennessee Williams. Copyright 1955 by Tennessee Williams and reprinted by permission of the publisher, New Directions.

The God whom it is wisdom to fear has powerful and courageous witnesses outside the church. To encounter this God and to be engaged with him is a deadly serious matter. And from this moral engagement comes a fierce contempt for the genteel and conventional demigods of our day—those companionable household deities of a people withdrawn as far as humanly possible from the raw frontiers of existence. These demigods are ubiquitous. In richly carpeted and decorous funeral parlors they whisper soothingly. They flit and flicker in our minds when disaster overtakes us, and they seduce us with comfortable and ingratiating sentiments. When we despair, they whisper that every cloud has a silver lining. When we would sit in sackcloth and cover our heads with ashes for our sins, they gently reprove us for thinking more poorly of ourselves than we ought to think. These demigods of the mist have been our companions and our masters; and in their service we have hoped to find peace of mind. But when the chips are down, half-gods evaporate. And the chips are down. If we people of the church are only vaguely aware that this is so, it is perhaps because the demigods still confuse and bedazzle us. In this respect the “heathen” in our midst may be more mature religiously than we are. When this is so, evangelism has its problems—among the targets of the program must be truly inspired atheists who know that half-gods do not exist.⁴

⁴ From *Toward a Theology of Evangelism* by Julian N. Hartt. Copyright 1955 by Pierce & Washabaugh. By permission of Abingdon Press.

With all this, the evangelist has to keep close to the church, knowing that God is at work there, and that he will never leave himself without witnesses.

In a seminar held recently, a brilliant Christian philosopher was expounding with telling effectiveness the lethargy and hypocrisy that had finally driven him out of the ministry. He went on to describe the pain and loneliness that he felt when he had been forced by conviction to leave the comfortable pastorate of the organized church. He even spoke of the Cross in relation to this powerful experience. One of the members of the seminar was one of the wisest Christian statesmen of our country. Finally, he could contain himself no longer. He said in effect, "You speak of the Cross. The greatest Cross I know is to stay inside the church—to contend daily with its halting halfheartedness, and its equivocation. And yet, to know that it is necessary to stay and be faithful because this is Christ's body."

PRACTICE

How does a church organize its life for outreach into the community? The first step is a negative one; that is, to resist the temptation of keeping so much activity going inside the walls that there is no time to look outward. The second step is the development of an awareness of parish responsibility—a continuing sense of identification with the common life of

the geographical community in which it is set. At this point, evangelism and social action become the same process. There is no more potent evangelistic witness in a community than the church's concern and action on behalf of justice or in the meeting of some critical human need. We must remember that we prate a good deal about love and compassion and justice. Therefore, when the opportunity to exercise these virtues in a community crisis is ignored, the silent witness is deafening. What has been wrong with much of our social action projects in the church is the same that has characterized our evangelism efforts. The projects have been short term and often highly hortatory about somebody else's sins. A community is not fooled by highly publicized efforts to be the Good Samaritan on the corner. If the people of a congregation are not regularly identified with school problems, community planning, recreation, discrimination in housing, and identified as completely concerned about the people who suffer because of these problems, then no one is impressed by high-sounding calls to citizenship from the pulpit one Sunday before election. There is a strong tradition both within the church and in the community that the church must not mix in politics. Somehow this is a doctrine badly derived from our legitimate heritage to keep church and state separate. The early church certainly did not feel that the church was excluded from political and civic involvement. Wherever

the problems of citizenship impinged upon God's loving will for men, then a witness had to be made. Ernest Wright, in *The Biblical Doctrine of Man in Society*, writes:

The Christian attitude toward the Roman state varied in the New Testament, ranging from absolute condemnation to approval and cooperation. Both extremes seem to be present in every period. (For example, in approximately the same time that Revelation pictures the Roman Empire as a Satanic beast or blasphemous harlot, in which there is no positive value, Clement of Rome composes a beautiful prayer for political rulers in which he says, "Give them, Lord, health, peace, concord, stability, in order that they may administer without offence the Government that has been given them by Thee.")⁵

The church must have a regular opportunity to face its witnessing and serving responsibility. The minister can surely preach about it, or a social action committee can study it, but these are only preparatory steps to the church as a whole *facing* it. In a small church, there should be regular church meetings, not to conduct routine business, but to discuss the corporate life of the church and the needs and opportunities of the community. Very often the church is the last agency in a community to know about special problems, and often the only relationship the church has to neigh-

⁵ G. Ernest Wright, *The Biblical Doctrine of Man in Society*, London: SCM Press, Ltd., p. 149. By permission of the publisher.

borhood concerns is for the minister to give the invocation at the meeting where everyone else is bent on action. The church ought to be the first group in the community to spot areas of crisis, whether these be in terms of housing problems or intangible tension between groups. There is a long road between taking action in such areas and becoming "politically partisan," which is always the big fear. Indeed, there may be times when the situation demands partisan political stands. This is not beyond the realm of the claim of the gospel. But there are so many places short of that, where the church must speak and act in the community, that to raise it is to throw sand into the discussion.

In large churches, the problem is made more difficult by the awkwardness of getting a consensus. Here a social action committee, working closely with the spiritual leaders of the church, may very well be authorized by the church to wield discretionary powers in relation to the social witness of the church in the community.

Parish responsibility, of course, is not limited to concern for social problems in which people happen to be involved. An intimate knowledge of the personal lives of people who live in the parish is necessary. Thus, social action never becomes an abstract "issue" which the church has no business espousing. Social problems and personal problems are related to specific people who are known by name, and who are of direct con-

cern to the church. Church people, in such a concern, see their friends and neighbors as people among whom they are set to serve. The Iona Community and the East Harlem Protestant Parish have done much in the last decade to demonstrate how this is the central principle of building church program. Instead of starting with a syllabus of emphases or projects from among which they would choose points of action, they have always begun with the immediate, aching need of the people among whom they live. It is perhaps easier to see these points of human need in economically depressed areas, but this does not mean that the principle is not the soundest one for all churches to follow in their relationships to the community. This means that clergymen and laymen must be available and accessible to the community as a whole. This does not mean simply publishing in the newspaper the hours when people may be counseled in the church study. The people who seek out such help probably need it, but they are not necessarily the ones who need it the most, or are really most open to the inbreaking of the Word of God. The minister and people must be willing to be accessible in social and informal occasions and to be looking for opportunities to make a witness. This does not mean preparing a canned speech for lulls in the conversation at parties. Rather it means developing the kind of compassionate understanding and defenseless humanness to which people will instinctively turn.

The whole matter of the Christian life which supposedly makes a witness without uttering a word is often reduced to inanities. Christians don't give off a special neon glow which other people can detect, all the third points of ministers' sermons to the contrary notwithstanding. If they do, it is as likely to be conscious self-righteousness which people can pick out certainly, but not with the evangelistic results desired. Rather than letting church people brighten the corner where they are or the midcentury equivalent, we should help them to understand themselves and others with the basic realism of the Christian view of man. Contemporary psychology has given us many tools at this point which can be appropriated for our understanding of the feelings and sensitivities of ourselves and others. It is true that superficial understanding in this area in the hands of apprehensive or defensive people can be used to hurt as well as to help others. However, a man or woman who "accepts his acceptance by God," and has an appreciation of his own sin and pride, *does* communicate this to others in ways that are below the level of the verbal. A church that has in its membership a number of people who are sure of their salvation—that is, they know in the depth of their being that God has loved them and is with them despite their unworthiness—has true evangelists in its midst. These people may not necessarily be the most articulate, nor the most learned, but these are the

people who really proclaim the Word of God in the community. Such folk in the normal and often informal contacts of the parish are the gates through which the secretly anxious and wistfully hungry souls can enter the church.

It would seem that such opportunities and such a responsibility ought to occupy a great deal of the time of the minister. Nevertheless, many churches resent the minister's giving much time to anything that does not seem immediately related to promoting the church or ministering to those already members. The heart of being an evangelistic church does not reside in any program of promotion ever devised, but in the interest and affection of a church for those around it. This affection can never be simulated. It can, however, be stimulated both by the new understanding of human life which comes through Christ and by a sense of the absorbing drama of humanity that is being enacted in the fabric of community life.

True evangelism in our day is closely related to the ability to see beneath the surface of life. Few people seem to have time or the inclination. The old easy explanations of human behavior are accepted whether they be garbed in new pseudo psychological terms or the clichés of class structure. We judge people, and dispose of them in neat categories in the twinkling of an eye. He is aloof because he's absorbed in getting ahead, or she is difficult because she is defensive about

her weight, we say, and then go on to something else. Granting the partial truths that may be present, Christian churchmen must be unwilling to accept these insights as the final word that can be known about anyone. Knowing so much about human behavior, we sometimes seem strangely obtuse to the surprises that lurk in every man. Christian churchmen should be completely unorthodox when it comes to meeting people, getting to know them, helping to break open the old shells that they have worn a long time. This is the heart of evangelism—the Christian gospel of disdain for the superficialities of the exterior. Visitation programs, and other methods, have meaning only if there are churchmen who have such an entree into the human heart.

In addition to a concern that reaches out to the problems and involvements of the physical community, the church must pray for others. This is an area we have taken all too lightly. We have never neglected the omnibus references to all "sorts and conditions" of men, but this was as much the reminding of God that we were not really so selfish, as anything else. Intercessory prayer is one of the most important parts of the worship life of the church. Intercessory prayer means earnest waiting upon the Lord for specific needs. Here the multitude of human relationships that reach out from the church like a network of sensitive wires,

are brought together and held up to God for empowering wisdom.

People should be prayed for by name in the church. Problems should be mentioned specifically. The dying of the old prayer meeting happened when people began to think that intercessory prayer was not valid, and also when it became a time for the display of public piety. There is great need for the re-establishment of special times of intercessory prayer in the life of the church. This, of course, should be a part of the corporate Sunday service, but also at other stated times.

Intercessory prayer for healing, mental and physical healing, must be restored to the church. If God is the redeemer of all of a man's life, then we know through the example of Christ that he is concerned for the body of a man too. Psychosomatic medicine has shamed us into recovering what the ancient church knew to be true—it is impossible to separate sin and mortality, the physical and the eternal.

Like most of the areas of greatest spiritual power, there is attendant upon the healing ministry of the church dangerous heresy and sin. Prayer groups can become sentimental and ingrown. Healing by prayer can become exhibitionistic and an un-Christian exploitation of the misery of the flesh. Both things are very apparent in contemporary Protestantism. This, however, is no reason to avoid the obligation laid upon us by Christ—to preach and teach and heal. Healing

must be seen by the church in the context of the whole mission of the church—the offering of the love of God which knows no boundaries and at the same time defies all human attempts to domesticate it and control it for our own ends.

Fundamentally, to be a church that offers salvation to a neighborhood means to be unafraid. That is, it means casting out fear of losing face, or of failing to be successful. It means taking seriously the life of Christ. He loved life. He was not shocked by anyone. He never confused the word for the deed. He felt no awe for custom and yet no need to be violently set against tradition. His humanity was the vessel of his divine love.

CHAPTER V

The Kingdom of God and How the Church Lives in It

EPISODE

Uncle Harry's not a missionary now.

Noel Coward's recorded voice rose strongly up the stairwell, and Marian Hillsworth visibly flinched.

"Why must they play that record eighteen hours a day?" she said to her husband, who was shaving in the adjoining bathroom. She was sorting through a dresser drawer, trying to find two white gloves that matched to lend to her daughter.

"I suppose they find it very appropriate," Henry Hillsworth said through the lather. The Hillsworths were dressing to go to a special evening service at the church, where their son-in-law and daughter were to be commissioned as missionaries to Africa.

"The whole thing has so many ridiculous undertones, that this flippant record just seems to dramatize it," Marian said.

"Well, you must admit it's consistent with everything else Tom has done since he married Ellen," her husband said.

"You know, the most irritating thing," he continued as he came into the bedroom, "is how charming everyone else finds him. They don't seem to see the irresponsibility that is his most obvious characteristic. And I suppose that's all Ellen ever sees, his charm, I mean."

"You'd think she'd see it, particularly since he's just thrown away one of the best opportunities any young engineer ever had. At least you said it was that kind of job," Marian replied.

The music grew louder.

Poor Uncle Harry,
After a chat with dear Aunty Mary,
Thought the time had come to make a row.
He lined up all the older girls
In one of the local sheds,
And while he was reviling them
And tearing himself to shreds,
They took their mother hubbards off
And tied them around their heads.
Uncle Harry's not a missionary now.
He's awfully happy,
But he's certainly not a missionary now! ¹

¹ "Uncle Harry," from *Noel Coward at Las Vegas*, Columbia Masterworks record ML 5063. Copyright © by Chappell & Co. Ltd., used by permission.

"For heaven's sake, let's go downstairs, and then maybe they'll stop playing that thing," Henry said.

"You know, Henry, there's one thing about this I don't understand," Marian said as she gathered up her purse and the gloves for Ellen.

"What?"

"What is the church coming to, when it accepts kids like that as missionaries? Why, in my childhood, I remember the missionaries that came to our church were always the most impressive men, dignified and . . . and sort of ascetic. Can't you see that big redheaded clown who is our son-in-law in the pulpit?"

She switched off the light for emphasis, and they went downstairs.

The record player was turned off as they entered the living room. Tom Lenreid stood up and asked his wife's parents, "Well, are you as nervous as we are?"

"I don't see why you should be nervous, Tom," his mother-in-law said. "After all, you've moved heaven and earth the last few months to bring this evening to pass. Here are some gloves, Ellen. I hope they'll fit you."

"We're nervous just the same, Mother," Ellen said. "It's not so much going so far away, as it is having everyone act as if we were doing something just a little indecent."

Her mother saw an opportunity to get in one more remark that reflected her displeasure.

"But my dear, if people act that way, it's just that no one ever thought of you and Tom as seriously interested in religion. Oh, we all knew you both were terribly attached to that chaplain in college, but you both seemed so normal and, if I may say so, dear, just a little scatterbrained."

"Mother, I think we ought to have a little talk about this," Tom said. Ellen looked at him with warning in her eyes, because she didn't have the faintest hope of her parents' understanding.

Tom went on anyway.

"We know you both think we're making a mistake about this. You may even be right. We're not 100 per cent sure. But we have to do it. You're wrong about not being very serious about the Christian faith. At least for me, it's the only thing that has ever made any sense to me. I've always been thought of as a kind of perennial Joe College, even before I was old enough to go to college. Mostly, I think this was to cover up my absolute disgust for the way people take things for granted, like growing up in a certain neighborhood, going to a certain school, getting a certain kind of job. You know, even church seemed to belong to this 'business as usual' kind of life, until Ellen and I began going to the study group at the Chapel. We found out there that the gospel had dynamite in it. It lets you know that life can't be bottled up in the genteel and

the respectable. Aw, I can't really explain it to you right."

Ellen tried to help, moved by her husband's speech.

"It's not that we think everybody ought to run off somewhere and be missionaries. But we have to, because we would never be able to stand up against the pressure to conform in that firm where Tom worked. We must *give* something in some place that really needs us, some place where time is running out. The Kingdom doesn't wait."

The Hillsworths were both touched and embarrassed by this sudden theological note.

"But you're both so young, and what about the children you will have? After all, Dr. Botsworth always says in his sermons that we are all building the Kingdom right where we are, here in Chicago. It all seems so wrong, so unorthodox." She sat down and took a clean handkerchief out of her pocket to dry her eyes.

DOCTRINE

What is the Church in relation to the Kingdom of God? This question is related to the preceding one, in that the frailty of the visible church leads us to wonder what the ultimate role for the church is within the full scope of God's redemptive purpose. Jesus undoubtedly uses the idea of the kingdom of God as the encompassing category for the full sovereignty of God over all flesh, and the New Testament writers seem to

extend it logically to include the final perfection of creation itself as a result of God's redeeming act. The theological puzzle surrounding the idea of the Kingdom concerns the immediacy with which the early church expected this fulfillment to take place. Albert Schweitzer restored to our thinking that overwhelming eschatological dimension of the New Testament which deals with the ending of time and last things. All events in the New Testament writings are colored by the expectation that the present structure of sin and evil will be ended by God soon in keeping with the revelation that has come in Christ. The tendency to use this unquestionable truth to discount the permanent validity of the teaching on the basis that the *eschaton* did not come was unfortunate and one-sided. The counter-thesis which has been largely framed by C. H. Dodd in recent years is that the hope of the Kingdom had been completely "realized" in the coming of Christ and no future divine event completing the gift of the Christ is indicated. It is interesting that both theses have been used by those who see the kingdom of God as essentially a Utopian ethical ideal, which will be achieved only through the development of the good works of men, and in which there is no need for the consideration of an end to history.

It does seem that both things are true of the kingdom of God as depicted in the New Testament—it is

both fully expressed and present in Christ, and yet not fully sovereign over all the creation. Christians look forward to the final reign of justice and love with real hope because they have beheld Christ. We have within history, through him, the key—yes, more than that—the essential embodiment of God's purpose, but we await the Reign of Christ over all the creation.

Now what part does the Church play in this present and yet to come Kingdom? Because the Church is a community and the Kingdom is surely a society, there is a natural tendency to subsume the Church under the Kingdom as a part of it—a manifestation of it. Indeed, there is the further temptation to equate the Church with the realized Kingdom. That is, to make an equation out of doctrinal ideas—if the Church is the body of Christ, and the Kingdom is manifest in the event of Christ, then the Church is in some way the kingdom of God. Such an oversimplification points out the danger of using doctrine as propositions that can be treated mathematically. For the Church, though it shares intimately in the gifts of the Kingdom through Christ, and through it stands under the judgment, is not the completed Kingdom. The Church is related to the Kingdom in the form of the Servant. It proclaims the Kingdom that has come, and further proclaims the Kingdom that is to come, with urgency and desperate seriousness.

CULTURE

The sense of the apocalyptic—the perspective of a dramatic and culminating fulfillment of prophecy—has largely moved out of the Church to be lodged somewhere else in the culture. The imminent end of the world is still a cornerstone of pentecostal churches, and particularly Jehovah's Witnesses, but it is embodied in such formalistic doctrinaire trappings that only a certain kind of mind sees it as a live option. Eschatological teaching about death, last judgment, and resurrection is very much a part of the body of faith of the Church, and yet it is often without apocalyptic urgency in the Church. The Church itself, with the continuing exception of the pentecostal branches, rarely examines its life in terms of the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness. There is probably no part of the gospel that seems so unnecessary to our churches as hope in the second coming. The reaction of American churches to the theme of the second assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, "Christ, the Hope of the World," was often one of irritation that we should consider anything so esoteric or irrelevant. Again this basic conviction that only the present, the here and now, has any reality, comes into the picture. If we do not believe in the reality of history, we are also impatient with anything that seems like conjecture about the future. Perhaps there is even more resistance to any specula-

tion concerning the future, because of the profound disillusionment of two or more generations who were bred on the belief that the future was a predictable extension of the present. That is, the early part of this century believed with a security hard for us now to imagine, that the age of final enlightenment had come, and that the task of transforming the world into heaven was a matter of determination, time, and good will. Two-and-one-half wars later, there is very little left of this general belief except a residue of a feeling of having been betrayed. Social gospelism as a realized eschatology is as dead in the churches as is optimistic hope about the future of civilization in the secular community.

This is certainly not to say that Americans are filled with despair about the future. They are just unwilling to count on anything beyond the life of their new automatic washer, or next summer's vacation. Politicians talk about building a great new America in campaign oratory in the same speech in which they are pledging themselves to moderation and conservatism. If the mood of America is truly a cautious one—let's hold onto what we've got and be grateful—it is not equivalent to an overwhelming sense of well-being. Observers from abroad continually note our ambivalent way of acting singularly superior and then anxiously complaining because we are afraid other nations don't like us. Perhaps it is a persistent remnant from the Calvin-

ist part of our national heritage that we are from time to time aware that our greatest goodness is not good enough. This Calvinist strain, however, if it be that, has been completely shorn of eschatological meaning. We seem to be saying that if *we* are not good enough, with all the advantages we have had, what then can be counted on? In some ways, the renewed emphasis on "moral and spiritual" values that seems to be the theme song of every public figure, is due to the belief that we must have been remiss somewhere in building the twentieth century American ideal. The implication is that if we could just ingraft these values, then the whole man, worthy to be praised in his own right, might emerge.

In a recent political campaign, a candidate was praised by one of his supporters as being a great man because "he was humble enough to pray to God for help." This inverted exaltation of man which is at least a small part of the return to religion in American life, is stimulated by the absence of visible eschatological hope in the Church.

There are, however, other segments of our culture that are profoundly apocalyptic.

One of the most obvious groups has been the group of atomic scientists who were shocked out of their indifference to the meaning of life by the terrible instruments of power they had created. It was both very moving and at the same time pathetic to hear those

voices from the laboratory in the late forties calling for responsible action in civic life, philosophical inquiry, and all the other necessary disciplines of society which they had so long ignored. Many of these men revealed an incredible naiveté about the complexities of human nature, but they were nobly prophetic in declaring the possible horror to which human sin could carry the world.

Contemporary literature and the arts have been increasingly obsessed with the apocalyptic in the last decades. While the Church was reflecting its peoples' interest in the down-to-earth practicalities of life, a new art and literature became more imaginative and more interior in its scope. The whole nonobjective movement in art, which is not to be universally praised as great art, nevertheless produced in the aesthetic realm affirmations of ultimate meaning not dependent on visual conformity to man's ideal of himself. The great moderns like Picasso both probe man's condition with honesty and glorify purity of form and movement which does not seem to be captive to his sin. And then there is Rouault, who alone among the great artists of our day, sees the contemporary drama of life and death in the light of the Christian view of the *eschaton*. In the *Miserere* series, he depicts the agony of Christ with such boldness that the Christian epic, today's agony, and tomorrow's resurrection are seen to be integrally re-

lated. He closes his preface to the portfolio of prints for the *Miserere* series with these poetic lines:

Form, color, harmony
Oasis or mirage
For the eyes, the heart, and the spirit
Toward the moving ocean of pictorial appeal

"Tomorrow will be beautiful," said the shipwrecked man
Before he disappeared beneath the sullen horizon

Peace seems never to reign
Over this anguished world
Of shams and shadows

Jesus on the cross will tell you better than I,
Jeanne in her brief and sublime replies at her trial
As well as other saints and martyrs
Obscure or consecrated.²

Many novelists have dealt with apocalyptic themes in the past few years—deriving their vision not from a Christian view of the future, but generally by following out the worst implications they can see inherent in an industrialized and scientized culture. In many ways, such novels are profoundly Christian because the shock and horror they express at the dehumanization of men which they see coming to terrible tragedy at some

² *The Miserere of Georges Rouault*, copyright 1952 held by The Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York. By permission of The Museum of Modern Art.

future date is in response to the view of the perfect society in the Christian epic.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Gore Vidal's *Messiah*, and Shepherd Mead's *Big Ball of Wax*, are among the best of a host of such novels.

Geddes MacGregor has produced a novel of this type with particular reference to the future of the Christian church, called *From a Christian Ghetto*.

Quite apart from these obviously apocalyptic novels, there are important strains within contemporary literature that are filled with eschatological meaning. The vogue of naturalism has almost completely disappeared in the last decade or two. Human relationships are probed for meanings and overtones that may reflect the universal and the ultimate without outlining a system or often even so much as declaring a belief in anything. It is almost that many contemporary writers, abhorring the shallowness of preached truth, want to catch it unaware, to come upon it in a relentless searching of the human heart and mind. The great writers, like Graham Greene, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Joyce Cary, who are quite obviously oriented toward the Christian faith, do this. So also do a number of younger writers who often seem on the surface to be telling weird stories of the distortion of human loneliness and longing. Carson McCullers, Jean Stafford, Flannery

O'Conner, Frederick Beuchner, J. D. Salinger, are people like this.

Existentialism has brought its own eschatological impact into literature, and also into the outlook of ordinary people with more effect than would at first seem to be true. The existentialist emphasis that all meaning is inherent in the living situation, though devoid of any intended religious content in the formulations of its pioneer writers like Sartre, is a close kin to Christian theology in its doctrine of time and history. Time and history are all wrapped up in this moment of existence, and for the secular existentialist, this means that there is no hope beyond the satisfaction of the moment. For the Christian it means that this moment, both its satisfactions and its frustration, has its final unassailable hope in Christ.

In 1956, a curious existentialist play, "Waiting for Godot," by Samuel Beckett, had a successful run on Broadway. For two acts, two philosophic hoboes on a bare stage discuss the frightening boredom of life while they are waiting for a mysterious Mr. Godot who has said he will come to them. Only this expected appearance has any interest for them. This is their only hope. He does not come, but sends word as he has done many times previous (through his son) that he will come tomorrow. The play is filled with the excruciating, finger nail-on-blackboard kind of dialogue that characterizes so much of existentialist writing. And yet

there is a hope—justified or unjustified, the author is not willing to say. The play represents a kind of stage in transition from doctrinaire existentialism toward the Christian hope. It is a play of serious power through which one feels the aching of the human heart for an assurance that can be believed of the coming of Christ's kingdom. No one who sees or reads the play will be able to believe afterward that a careful explication of Christian doctrine about how it is all going to be at the end of history, will meet the need. Eschatological hope has to be about the next breath as well as the next aeon.

One of the characters in "Waiting for Godot" is a wandering fat man named Pozzo, repulsive, pathetic, and yet strangely wise, who is at first taken by the hoboos to be Godot. In fact, it is even possible that he may have been and they did not know it. He appears in the first act, and again in the second, but in his last appearance he is blind. His exit speech is a clue to the mood of existentialism.

POZZO (suddenly furious): Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (Calmer.) They give birth astride of a grave,

the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.
(He jerks the rope.) On! ³

This feeling of living deeply involved in human tragedy, yet under the sign of ultimate meaning is the mark of eschatological hope. It is not so often as apparent in the life of the Church as it is among those who feel disinherited by our society. It is the Church's loss, because it is essential to the gospel of the victorious Christ.

PRACTICE

It is well-nigh impossible to tell a church how to live with the fact that Christ has come and yet with the expectancy that the full Kingdom is yet to come. The repeated saying of it stimulates nothing but "So what?" after a time. Yet the church which does not live on this frontier misses the unique experience which is part of its strangeness.

At the risk of seeming too homiletically pat (the very curse of the eschatological hope), three attitudes might be said to be true of a Christian and a Christian people today who know the Kingdom not of this world and yet love the kingdom of the flesh.

The first is a *sense of outrage*. One might suppose that Christian love would come first, or at least preclude an emotion so strong as outrage. Christian love

³ P. 57, top of second page, "Waiting for Godot," by Samuel Beckett, copyright 1954 by Grove Press, New York. Used by permission.

can never really head the list of prescribed attitudes, for it cannot be reduced to code or exhausted in conduct. It is released in the affairs of men through the resting of their hope in God. And one of the observable results of that love is a burning sense of indignation against the encrusted, well-established evil of the world. Compassion for others cannot be severed from shock that human beings are trapped by sin and put upon by the ruthlessness of other men, sometimes the best-intentioned people in the world. There are so few things that shock us any more, or raise us to the point of speaking up when hypocrisy or cruelty is in the saddle. The realization that all men are sinners does not allow us the excuse of smiling indulgently and impartially upon bully and victim alike.

When the Christian loses the conviction that sham and phoniness, as well as cruelty, are worth striking against, then he has rationalized Christ's commendation of the childlike heart out of the gospel. If Christ is the Victor, then he cannot be mocked by our cheap sophistication which considers deceitfulness, public or private, as psychologically necessary. This does not necessarily mean that the church must take up the battle ax of Carrie Nation to rush out on crusades against the local gambling laws. The more important crusade is the one of blasting the pretensions of our time, foremost among them self-advertising public piety.

The church ought to be among other things a center of outrage against discrimination directed at any group of people and also against commercialized opinion manipulating. The voice from the pulpit has become less and less a voice of outrage. It has often become querulous complaint. "Thus saith the Lord," is strongly offensive to a people who believe that "This, thinks the minister," is the most that can be said. One is drawn back immediately to the earlier stress on the authority of the Word of God. The clean thrust of judgment which the gospel brings to oppose us at the times of our equivocation and wrestling must be expected in the church.

What is more, the community at large ought to expect it from the church. Churchmen are on public record about altogether too many petty issues—petty ones, at that, which are identified in the public mind as being inherent in the church lobby. Just as the veterans' lobby has an interest in relief to veterans, and the real estate lobby is opposed to public housing, so the Protestant church lobby has a vested interest in being against gambling (particularly Bingo), alcohol, and for separation of church and state. No one is surprised or very much influenced when bishops testify on these matters. But when Protestant churchmen speak out in controversial areas like political candidacy, housing, and civil rights, people do listen. A

sense of outrage marks the church's awareness of the Kingdom that is yet to come.

Closely allied to a sense of outrage, is the need for a *sense of humor*. Without it, even the justifiable outrage can easily become pomposity, one of the worst kinds of hypocrisy. To know when to fight and when to laugh is an art that the church might well learn. Unfortunately there are no "how to" books which are adequate to the task of helping a church stop taking itself so seriously in order that the gospel of the church can be felt with all its spontaneous effect.

Humor may well enough be a weapon against the pretensions of the world, but it is even more effectively a weapon against its own stuffiness. Satire on churchy habits and clerical innocence of the *New Yorker* type are wonderful antidotes to the self-enclosed world that it is so easy to create. This does not demean the intensely serious purpose of the church. Only cheap attempts to be cute or folksy can accomplish this. Such jokes are not really humor of the penetrating sort, since they are broad attempts to convince people that though we know the church is above human failure we want to make patronizing overtures to the common people. Devastating humor—humor that cuts us down to size, proclaims the real miracle of the incarnate Christ, he who never hesitated for a second to ask if an action was proper for a representative of divinity, but

in all humanity was one among many, and yet invincibly God all the time.

Such a freedom to laugh and to jest at our failure, and yet continue to act in ways that will invite another jest, is of the very essence of living in the grace of God. Life in the light of that grace is a continual series of attempts to put into practice the high purposes of the Kingdom, and a continual realization of how ludicrous the attempt often is. Such a life is saved from cynicism by the overriding sense of awe that all such attempts are redeemed to God's purpose in ways we had not planned or ever foreseen in our own wisdom.

Without a sense of the ludicrous, the consciousness of God's unfettered purposes can become dim. Personal satisfaction or personal failure and cynicism become the only alternatives.

Oliver St. John Gogarty, in his book of Irish reminiscences, *Start from Somewhere Else*, partially defines why a sense of humor is often a surer path to a knowledge of the Kingdom than anything else.

Laughter may be a sudden triumph; it is a sudden triumph when it becomes a triumph over life. When it proves, even for a second, that we have within us something of the immortals' courageous heart or mighty mind. Something that makes us spectators of life as if we were not in its arena. Laughter it is that differentiates us from the beasts and makes us superior to the beast within us.

Laughter enables us to see things under the aspect of Eternity.⁴

As companion of outrage and humor, a *sense of destiny* needs restoring to the church.

"An endless line of splendor, these troops with heaven for home," wrote Vachel Lindsay. How pallid we make our heritage and our destiny when we are tied too closely to decimal appraisals of this year's growth over last year's, or our failure to conform to the perfect image of clean-cut America at prayer.

Here we are, an American congregation at work and worship. We have come from our prefabricated houses in our late model Chevrolet. We have on our minds the threat of tomorrow's encounter with the boss over a "friendly" drink, and the problem of Junior's intransigent preference for sports cars to algebra.

And here we are, straight from an early morning seance with television's animated cartoons, and remembering a brush with Charlie, who made an insulting remark about our wife at the corner tavern last night.

And yet here we are, the called-out people of God, confident that though we know in part, such a little part, tomorrow we shall know fully, even as we are also known.

⁴ P. 187, *Start from Somewhere Else*, by Oliver St. John Gogarty. Copyright © 1955 by Oliver St. John Gogarty, reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

Here as we hear the Word of God in all its mystery broken open for our health, we are one with that congregation who met in the back streets of Jerusalem. We are at Hippo in the last agonies of a dying civilization. We are in an unknown chapel in the backwoods, where our great, great-grandfather (whose name we may not ever know) heard the Scripture read. We are at the Last Judgment, with all the company of angels and of men, beholding in glory the Lamb upon the Throne.

No fear shall frighten us. No neurosis of this uncertain age shall turn us aside. We belong to the Kingdom whose Lord is Christ.

And He is "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

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